The Historical Society of the Reformed Church in America
Occasional Papers
No. 1

Mission to Borneo

by
Gerald De Jong

Historical Society, RCA
New Brunswick, New Jersey

This series is designed to provide an opportunity for the publication of important and useful papers which will aid in the understanding of the life and mission of the Reformed Church in America. Publications will include mission histories, congregational histories, transcription of original source material from the Reformed Church Archives and other pertinent historical documentation.

It is our desire that it will prove to be helpful and stimulating and will serve to challenge us in the present as we grow into the future.

Russell L. Gasero
Office of Historical Services
Reformed Church in America

Contents

Preface

In 1836, four young men with their wives and one unmarried woman were commissioned as representatives of the Reformed Church to establish a mission somewhere in the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia). As events turned out, the island of Borneo was eventually selected as a site for what was to be the denomination's first overseas mission for which it had primary responsibility. Additional missionaries arrived later as preaching stations and schools were founded to spread the Christian gospel among three groups of people—Chinese immigrants and Malayans along the coast and primitive Dyaks in the interior. Unfortunately, the optimism that was expressed about the mission's future during the early period gradually gave way to discouragement, and it was abandoned in 1849. What circumstances prompted the Reformed Church to establish a mission in what was then a very remote area of the world, and what were the experiences of those who served there? What factors led to its abandonment only a few years after it was founded? These are some of the questions this study will answer concerning this little known but fascinating episode in the history of Reformed Church missions.

Gerald F. De Jong
Professor Emeritus of History
University of South Dakota
at Vermillion

1
Background to the Mission

The establishment of a Reformed mission on the island of Borneo in 1836 was the culmination of a growing interest that the Reformed Church began showing in missions after the American Revolution. In 1796, for example, members of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches of New York City organized the New York Missionary Society, and in the following year these same denominations organized the Northern Missionary Society at Lansingburg, New York. Neither of these societies became involved in foreign missions but worked primarily among the Indians, and neither of them was ever officially sanctioned by General Synod. In 1817, however, General Synod did approve the formation of the United Missionary Society consisting of delegates from Reformed, Associate Reformed, and Presbyterian churches. Although the constitution specified that the work of this body would include foreign lands, lack of funds restricted activities to the domestic field.

Meanwhile, discussions about missions began taking on a broader meaning. Thus, in 1810, a group of interested faculty and students at New Brunswick Seminary organized the Berean Society (renamed the Society of Inquiry in 1820) for the purpose of corresponding "with similar societies in other seminaries and with missionaries, domestic and foreign, and to diffuse among ourselves a zeal for the missionary cause." Similarly, in 1818, General Synod resolved that a missionary sermon should henceforth be preached at some convenient time during its annual sessions. Some of these sermons emphasized the need for entering the foreign field and were published and circulated.

A major step was taken in 1826 when the United Missionary Society merged with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an ecumenical body created in 1810 for the purpose of encouraging world missions. Although there was considerable opposition to this move, General Synod consented to it because of the financial difficulties of the United Missionary Society and because Synod believed that the world-wide goal of missions could be better fulfilled by such a merger. Even more significant action was taken in 1832

when, by agreement with the American Board, steps were taken permitting the Reformed Church to assume primary responsibility for certain specified foreign fields. To carry out these plans, General Synod appointed a Board of Foreign Missions consisting of nine ministers and six laymen.

The duties of the denominational Board included the selection of stations, recruitment of missionaries, raising funds, and corresponding with missionaries in the field. In carrying out these functions, the Reformed Church, because of its lack of experience in foreign missions, was allowed to use the facilities of the American Board's headquarters in Boston and to consult with its staff. In return for these privileges, the denominational Board and its missionaries were expected to keep the American Board informed of what they were doing and to consult with its executive committee, officially called the Prudential Committee, before making major decisions.

At the time the agreement of 1832 was made, the Reformed Church already had two of its sons in the foreign mission field, namely, John Scudder, M.D., in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and the Reverend David Abeel in East Asia. Scudder, a member of the Franklin Street Reformed Church of New York City, had given up a lucrative medical practice in 1819 to go to Ceylon under the auspices of the American Board as an itinerant missionary preacher and doctor. Later, he was transferred to southern India where he assisted in founding the Arcot Mission. Abeel, an ordained minister of the Reformed Church who had shown an interest in Far East missions for several years, sailed in 1829 for China in behalf of the American Seaman's Friend Society. His primary task at this time was to serve as chaplain to foreign sailors at Canton, the only port in China that was legally open to foreign trade until 1842. In 1830, in accord with a prior agreement, Abeel entered the service of the American Board and began traveling extensively in its behalf throughout Southeast Asia, visiting Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia).

It was through the work of Abeel that the Reformed Church became interested in establishing a mission in the Dutch East Indies, an interest that ultimately resulted in the Borneo mission. During his travels in Southeast Asia, Abeel spent nearly five months on the island of Java, the main colonial holding of the Dutch. There he engaged in various missionary labors including preaching, distributing religious literature, and making inquiries about sites for possible mission stations. His reports to America helped awaken a missionary interest in the Dutch East Indies among members of the Reformed Church, an awakening that was enhanced by the denomination's Dutch origins.

In 1834, while enroute back to the United States, Abeel spent a

brief period in the Netherlands where he discussed with various religious leaders and organizations the possibility of the Reformed Church in America becoming an instrument for missionary work among the Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia. Although the individuals and groups he conferred with expressed reservations about the proposal, they did not discourage it. Upon arrival in the United States, Abeel used every opportunity available to him to acquaint Reformed Church leaders and audiences with his views.

Primarily as a result of the interest that Abeel kindled, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church and the Prudential Committee of the American Board, after extensive discussions, agreed to cooperate in establishing a mission somewhere in the East Indies. The exact site was to be determined later and was to be based on the advice of the first missionaries to be sent to that part of the world. In accordance with the agreement that had been reached earlier in 1832, the denominational Board of Foreign Missions was given responsibility for appointing the missionaries and directing them in their work, with the American Board lending whatever assistance it could to assure the mission's success.

Upon learning of the proposed mission, several groups within the Reformed Church immediately announced their willingness to support the project. These included the Classis of Poughkeepsie, the Missionary Society of the Broome Street Church in New York City (which had a tradition of supporting missions), and the First Reformed Church of Philadelphia (whose pastor, the Reverend George Bethune, was a strong proponent of missions). Although the American Board gave some financial help, most of the support came from the Reformed Church. Funds collected by the latter were sent to the American Board's office at Boston which had the necessary facilities and expertise for transmitting money and supplies overseas.

In response to an appeal for Reformed missionaries, four men in 1836 agreed to go to the Dutch East Indies. Three of them, the Reverends Elihu Doty, Elbert Nevius, and William Youngblood, had just graduated from New Brunswick Seminary, while a fourth, the Reverend Jacob Ennis, had graduated the previous year. Accompanying them were their wives and Mrs. Nevius' sister, Azubah Condict, who had offered her services in behalf of female education in the tropics. Before their departure, they visited a number of Reformed congregations, preaching and lecturing on the need for missions.

The missionaries received their instructions during a solemn ceremony on May 30, 1836, in the Middle Dutch Church of New York City. Stirring speeches were delivered by several influential religious leaders, including the Reverend Rufus Anderson, one of the secretar-

ies of the American Board, and the Reverend Thomas De Witt, secretary of the Reformed Church Board of Foreign Missions. The honorable Peter Vroom, governor of New Jersey and a long-time elder of the Somerville Reformed Church, also delivered an address. The Reverend Jacob Ennis spoke in behalf of the missionaries.

It must be noted that there was as yet no indication that the missionaries would locate on the island of Borneo. They were simply charged at this time to go to the Dutch East Indies and use their own discretion in choosing a site for a permanent mission. In making this choice, however, they were instructed to keep two considerations in mind: first, that the mission be located in a place where it would not interfere with the work of other Protestant missions, and second, that it be established in a region having a significant number of inhabitants.

The missionaries left New York on June 8, 1836, and arrived at Batavia on September 15, 1836. Batavia, today called Djakarta, was the seat of the Dutch colonial government in the East Indies. Because this was still the age of sail, the voyage took ninety-eight days. Although no land was sighted until within three days of Batavia, the journey was generally a pleasant one, except for the initial seasickness experienced by the passengers and some severe gales that were encountered while rounding the Cape of Good Hope.

A variety of religious activities occupied the missionaries during the voyage. At ten o'clock each morning and at eight o'clock each evening the missionary families met together for prayer and scripture reading, and assembled twice a week for special services: on Monday evenings to study the book of Hebrews, and on Thursday evenings to discuss their religious experiences of the preceding week and to suggest ways by which they could live more piously. Special days were also observed now and then as days of humiliation, prayer, and thanksgiving, and the women held prayer meetings among themselves on Saturday afternoons.

Concern was also shown for the spiritual needs of the ship's crew. When the weather permitted, public worship services were held in the cabin area of the ship at two o'clock on Sunday afternoons, at which time one of the missionaries delivered a sermon. Later in the afternoon, Bible classes were held in the ship's forecastle. From time to time, the women also distributed religious literature provided by the American Tract Society. Although the voyage ended without any "signal displays of divine grace" among the crew, the meetings with the sailors were generally well-attended and two or three of them promised "to no longer live as they formerly had."

On arriving at Batavia, a warm welcome was received from the small group of missionaries from other denominations already residing there.

These included two Americans from the Episcopal Church, several representatives from the London Missionary Society, and a German from the Rhenish Missionary Society. The new arrivals were temporarily quartered in a hotel in Batavia and in private homes of the missionaries until more permanent living accommodations could be procured.

Several additional members of the Reformed Church volunteered for service in the East Indies during the next few years. On May 25, 1838, the Reverends Frederick Bordine Thomson and William John Pohlman, with their wives, embarked from New York. Thomson had been serving a church at Upper Red Hook, New York, while Pohlman had recently graduated from New Brunswick Seminary. Two years after their departure, they were followed by the Reverends William Theodore Van Doren and Isaac P. Stryker, both of whom had graduated from New Brunswick Seminary the previous year. Van Doren was accompanied by his wife; Stryker was unmarried. In 1842, William H. Steele, also unmarried and likewise a recent graduate of the Seminary, left for the East Indies. Thus, in all, nine ordained ministers were sent out, together with the spouses of those who were married and one unmarried woman.

The missionaries were under no illusions regarding the tremendous amount of work that lay before them. Their initial reaction to the challenging task and the opportunities confronting them is clearly brought out in a letter written to the Reverend John Lille of Kingston, New York, by the Reverend Ennis on October 10, 1836, about three weeks after his arrival at Batavia:

> The missionary field here seems immense—beyond description. The number of people is so great, and they are of many nations, and kindred and tongues. The principal are the Malays, the Sundas, the Javanese, the Chinese and Europeans…The Chinese and Europeans, however, are very much mingled, through intermarriages, with those of other nations. The Malays, you are aware, are scattered in vast numbers along the coasts of a large part of the Archipelago…The Chinese are idolators—though they have little attachment to their religion. They are sufficiently intelligent to see its folly; but they have not been told of a Saviour, and in their darkness what can they do?…The Malays and Sundas and Javanese are Mahometans; but all that the great mass of people know of this religion is [the name of its founder] and a few outward observances.

Thus you see what a field is before us. And what are we amid so many? I thank God that in Him we have courage. Since I have been here, I have been ten times more than ever confirmed that it is my duty to be a missionary. Oh! if many of the dear Brethren in

America could see…what we here daily behold, they would forsake all and come bringing the gospel of salvation. Like the disciples of the Saviour, they would forsake their fishing nets; like Elisha, they would leave their plough and their oxen and help in some manner to carry forward this great and blessed work. Here, amidst so many hundreds of millions, there is a long, a loud, and crying demand for printers, teachers of schools, physicians, and preachers.

2
The Batavian Interlude

The decision to send missionaries to the Dutch East Indies was based in part on the hope that "special favors and privileges might be secured" in that area of the world because of the Reformed Church's "descent from and affinity to the Church of Holland." This hope, however, proved illusive. Despite the rich religious traditions that had long been characteristic of the Netherlands, the Dutch government did not appear particularly interested at this time in spreading the Christian gospel among its colonial inhabitants. Indeed, by working through the Minister of Colonies in The Hague and the Governor General at Batavia, the government did not hesitate to impose restrictions that at times proved to be serious handicaps for the successful prosecution of mission work.

The restrictions included a requirement that missionaries on arrival in the archipelago spend their first year at Batavia. In only one instance was an exception made to this rule: the Reverend William Steele, upon petition, was allowed to leave Batavia after spending only eight months there. Even after having completed the residency requirement, restrictions continued to be placed on the movements of the missionaries and they were permitted to locate only in places approved by the Dutch government. Thus it happened that the eventual choice of Borneo as a mission station was decided primarily by the Dutch authorities.

The imposition of governmental restrictions stemmed from two considerations. First, because of the close contacts and influence that missionaries frequently exercised among the native population, it was only natural that the government wanted to keep a careful watch on missionary activities. Secondly, because the primary interest of the Dutch was one of making the islands financially profitable for the mother country, the colonial government tended to refrain from doing anything that might cause unrest among the people and thereby jeopardize trade. Realizing that Christian proselyting might antagonize elements among the overwhelming Moslem population, the Dutch government was prone to take a neutral stand, and at times even a hostile attitude, toward Christian missions. This was particularly true in those areas where Dutch control was precarious and was exercised through native princes

and sultans. As explained by Ennis to the Classis of Bergen in a letter of August 1, 1838:

> The great reason why the government does not permit missionaries indiscriminately to settle on Java, is their fear that a public and general attack on the Mohammedan religion may assist, with other causes, to raise the island to rebellion. Not that the great body of the people are attached to that superstition—but they are very greatly under the influence of their chiefs and priests. The priests might be alarmed, and they, combining with the chiefs, perhaps discontented on other accounts, might make it the occasion of exciting the people against the present ruler. One of the Dutch civil officers said to me, "We, a handful of Hollanders, govern these many millions by policy, rather than by force, and we must not turn the feelings of a large and powerful class against us."

The late professor Amry Vandenbosch, a specialist on the history of the Dutch East Indies, had this to say about the official attitude of the Netherlands toward missions:

> Throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century the East Indian Government seemed to be ruled by the principle that it had an obligation to protect the religions prevailing among the people from weakening or disturbing influences. The Government was at first influenced by a fear of a fanatical Islamic resistance, but later by an exaggerated idea of religious neutrality.

From time to time, various avenues of discussion were explored as possible means for moderating the governmental restrictions. For example, communications were sent by the Board of Foreign Missions to the Netherlands Missionary Society in Holland asking for its assistance in the matter. The latter in 1839 suggested that two young men of the Reformed Church be sent for a year to the Missionary Institute in the Netherlands for training, after which they could be licensed and commissioned by the Netherlands Society. They would then, after receiving instructions from their own Reformed Church in America and upon "mutual consultation" with the Netherlands Society, "be sent to the most eligible points." The proposal elicited little interest among members of General Synod. A similar suggestion was made in the following year by the Dutch Minister of Colonies and received the same response. In particular, criticism of these suggestions was directed at the idea that the American missionaries would have to obtain ordination in the Netherlands. As explained by General Synod's Committee on Missions, this was a concession to which we "as a distinct and independent Church…cannot, and never ought to yield."

Several other approaches were also followed in efforts to alleviate the governmental restrictions. In 1838, the American Board and the denominational Board of

Foreign Missions joined in drafting a special letter to the Governor General at Batavia. Because of a feeling among some Dutch officials that the true aim of the missionaries was to advance American commercial interests, the letter tried to assure the colonial government that the missionaries had no connection whatever with the national government or with any state governments or with any departments of commerce. The purpose of the missionaries was "simply and solely" to spread the gospel among the "unevangelized." The letter was given along with the Reverends Thomson and Pohlman when they sailed for the East Indies in the late spring of 1838. In the following year, General Synod, working through its Committee on Missions, dispatched a letter to the king of the Netherlands via Harmonus Bleecker, the American charge d'affairs in the Hague, urging removal of the impediments under which the missionaries labored. A year later, a reply was still being awaited. Similarly, a visit in 1842 to the Netherlands by the secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, the Reverend Isaac Ferris, produced only limited success in alleviating the restrictions.

Despite criticism of the residency requirement, the year's sojourn at Batavia was by no means wasted. Indeed, in the course of time, those who made up the first group of missionaries, as well as those who came later, concluded that something like this could actually be deemed necessary. Thus the Reverend Thomson wrote in 1840 that if he had gone directly to a permanent field, as had at first been proposed, "it would have been necessary to spend a large proportion of. . .time in preparatory study. It may appear in the end that it was wisely ordered that we should not have the greatest stimulus to active exertion at this early stage of our program."

The year's stay at Batavia enabled the missionaries to acquaint themselves with the customs of the inhabitants of the archipelago and its geography—knowledge that was sorely lacking among the missionaries before their arrival because of the dearth of literature in America on these subjects. As explained by the Reverend Pohlman in a letter of October 1840 to the Classis of Albany:

> We must become acquainted with the people, their prejudices, their personalities—their peculiar notions; in fine, their whole moral and intellectual character, before we are prepared to do them much good. To make such acquisitions, requires time, and all the advantages of [the] situation, the experience of others and every other facility of which we can avail ourselves.

Batavia was well suited for this kind of preparation. In addition to being the seat of the colonial government, it had a polyglot population representing most types of people found on the islands. Its two hundred thousand inhabitants were made up of Javanese, Sundas, and Malays, along with about 30,000 Chinese, 5,000 Dutchmen, 1,000 Portuguese, and 250 Englishmen and Americans. Also present at Batavia were some inhabitants from other surrounding islands as well as a few Arabs and Bengalese.

The sojourn at Batavia was particularly advantageous in that it gave the missionaries an opportunity to obtain necessary language training, a procedure that had

been highly recommended by the Netherlands Missionary Society and other groups. All the missionaries immediately upon arrival undertook the study of the Malay language—the lingua franca of the islands. Its importance can be readily seen from the following communication from the Reverend Thomson:

> Being the language of commerce, [Malay] is used more or less by all. Most of the Chinese brought up here know more of it than they do their own tongue. All talk it and many read and even write it. It is used too. . .by the chiefs and leading men of all the surrounding tribes, so that it is the great primary medium of access to all classes of people in the Archipelago. The cultivation of this language, therefore, and the preparation of religious books in it, is and must continue to be a matter of lively and permanent interest to our Mission…It brings us also into direct contact with the Mahometans of all these islands.

Because of the likelihood of having extensive contacts with the Chinese in places other than Batavia, it was important that at least some of the missionaries also learn this language. As a consequence, two of the first arrivals, the Reverends Doty and Nevius, commenced its study about three months after they began work on the Malay language. Later, when the Reverend Pohlman arrived, he too undertook the study of Chinese. The other men, meanwhile, concentrated on Malay. As to the women, Miss Condict pursued Chinese, while others generally devoted themselves to the same language that their husbands studied.

In view of the later importance of Doty and Pohlman as missionaries among the Chinese on Borneo and still later on the mainland of China, it is interesting to note how they judged the residency requirement at Batavia. In 1840, Pohlman wrote the Classis of Albany:

> It is known to you that my attention has been turned to the Chinese people, and that I have undertaken to acquire their most difficult language. This, of course, is the first great work of a Missionary. His career as such can not be said to commence till he can with some degree of fluency speak the language of the people of his adoption. Hence his first work must be wholly preparatory, and in such a strange puzzle as the Chinese language, the most patient toil and most severe study are necessary before any available progress is made.
>
> But you may ask—is not an immediate residence among the people, the most desirable part for becoming qualified? I reply, yes, if there are settled stations, and we ourselves are not called to assume the duties and responsibilities for which we are wholly unqualified…But God, who knows the end from the beginning, has interfered, and sent us to Batavia, where there is a missionary establishment in full operation, and where

> we are enjoying the privilege (for such I esteem it) of prosecuting the study of the language with the assistance of Mr. Medhurst of the London Missionary Society, who has been on heathen ground 24 years, and is one of the best Sinologists now living. Here, too, are thousands of Chinese from whom we can daily learn. I have endeavored to make good use of all the facilities here in becoming familiar with the character of Chinese, and of their system of religion.

The missionaries also acquired some practical experience during their stay at Batavia. They distributed religious literature at the open air markets which attracted large numbers of people twice weekly, and when sufficiently prepared linguistically, they read to the people in Malay or Chinese from religious tracts and from scripture. The missionaries even established schools for the children. Pohlman, for example, maintained a boarding school for boys who were taught five hours of Chinese and three hours of English daily, as well as the usual religious subjects. A Chinaman was employed to teach Chinese language, while Pohlman taught the other courses. The missionaries also took turns preaching in the English chapel at Batavia to the approximately two hundred fifty English and Americans residing there.

The degree to which the missionaries tried to carry on evangelical work before establishing themselves at their own permanent mission is seen in a communication from the Reverend Thomson written in September 1840:

> Besides, we have kept up a small day school, Br. Pohlman superintending the instruction in Chinese and myself that in Malay. The children of the school, with our teachers and servants, have also formed a nowise uninteresting congregation every day, especially in the morning family worship, which we have been able to conduct with some facility in the Malay language—reading the Scriptures, expounding, and prayer…also singing.

While at Batavia, the missionaries also did some writing and translated a number of religious works into the native languages. For example, in August 1838, Ennis declared that with the assistance of two natives he had translated into Malay a short catechism for children and also "Little Prayers for Little People." Of the latter, he reported that "two thousand five hundred were printed, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that they have been useful." Similarly, Thomson translated into Malay a few small publications issued by the American Tract Society and made plans for issuing an elementary textbook suitable for use in missionary schools.

Although there were obvious advantages to remaining at Batavia and consideration was given to establishing a permanent Reformed mission there, the missionaries from the beginning were determined to establish themselves in some "untrodden" region. On October 5, 1836, about three weeks after the arrival of the first group of missionaries, a short meeting was held with the Dutch Governor General, at which

time the missionaries presented the usual petition requesting permission to reside in the city. More significantly, permission was requested for traveling to other places in the East Indies "in order to select, in the providence of God, the most promising field for the permanent location of our mission." The petition described in some detail the plans of the missionaries and emphasized once again that their sole purpose was "to carry out the Saviour's command, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,'" and that they would in no way interfere with the "politics or commerce" of the region.

The petitioners were not optimistic that their request would be granted in every detail, particularly regarding travel on the island of Java. Other missionaries at Batavia had advised them that the government's policy during the past several years had been to allow evangelical work only among the Chinese and Malays residing in Java's large cities, and to disallow entirely any labors among the great mass of Javanese who lived in the interior. As to the other islands under Dutch control, the government by this time was leaning toward restricting non-Dutch missionaries to Borneo and Sumatra.

Not until December 7, two months after the above request had been made, were the missionaries given permission to reside at Batavia; no mention was made about the right to travel in search of a site for a permanent mission. Consequently, on February 14, 1837, after lengthy discussions among the missionaries, another petition was forwarded to the Governor General. The new request asked permission for the Reverends Doty and Ennis to visit some of the principal places on the east coast of Java, and also Borneo, Celebes, the Moluccas, and some of the islands to the southeast for the purpose of selecting a field for their permanent labors.

As happened so many times before, the Dutch government procrastinated in giving an answer. Finally, not having received a reply after an interval of six months, the missionaries on August 24 wrote home for instructions on what their next course of action should be. Upon receipt of this letter in November, a joint conference of representatives from the American Board and the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions recommended that the missionaries wait no longer for an answer to their latest petition. It further suggested that those missionaries who had concentrated on learning the Malay language "throw themselves upon Divine Providence" and "if possible secure sea passes, and proceed with their families at once to Macassar, on the island of Celebes." It was hoped that the Dutch government would tolerate such a move even though it would not give it official sanction. Because only a few Chinese lived on Celebes, the two Boards further recommended that the missionaries who had been studying Chinese either remain at Batavia or go to some part of Borneo which had a sizeable Chinese population.

A few weeks after these instructions were sent to Batavia, the missionaries finally received a reply to the petition that had been presented to the Governor General seven months earlier. It prohibited the missionaries from establishing themselves on Java (other than at Batavia) or on Celebes or the Moluccas, but it did grant permission to go to the island of Borneo to "prosecute their labors among the heathen." Unfortunately, the government's reply referred only to Doty and Ennis, the two men

who were specifically mentioned in the petition; no reference was made regarding the future destiny of Youngblood and Nevius. Permission for them to go to Borneo was not granted until a few months later.

In allowing them to go to Borneo, the missionaries had to agree to the following stipulation:

> No missionary may leave for Borneo before he has previously under oath or in any other solemn manner that his creed may require pledged his word before the Resident of Batavia that he will at all times refrain from teaching the natives any thing which may in the least tend to weaken the native obedience to their superiors which is required of them.

The old stipulation also remained in force requiring newly arrived Reformed missionaries to spend a year's residence at Batavia before going to Borneo.

On hearing of this turn of events, the overseers in America quickly dispatched new instructions to the missionaries. These included the following: that the missionaries abide by the terms of any document received from the colonial government; that the permission to labor on the island of Borneo be considered a providential call, making it the Christian duty of the missionaries to go there; and that an open mind be kept regarding possible places for establishing future mission stations at places not expressly included in the prohibition outlined in the government's reply.

3
Preparations for Borneo

Upon receiving permission to locate on Borneo, the missionaries began making plans to move themselves and their families to that place. What were conditions like in this new region where they would struggle for a decade, only in the end to see the field abandoned? To properly understand the Borneo mission and the unique experiences of its missionaries, a brief description of the island and its inhabitants must be given.

Borneo encompasses nearly 300,000 square miles and is the world's third largest island, being exceeded in size only by Greenland and New Guinea. Because it lies astride the equator, it has year-around high temperatures, frequent heavy rains (averaging about 150 inches annually), and luxurious tropical vegetation that in many places is virtually impenetrable. The island's animal life, like its flora, is also varied and includes many species that in America are found only in zoos. The missionaries of Borneo no doubt often stood in awe as they surveyed their new surroundings which had little about them that was reminiscent of conditions at home.

The inhabitants of the section of Borneo which the Reformed missionaries chose for their field of labor were a heterogeneous group. Those residing in the interior were indigenous tribesmen who had been little affected by outside culture. Collectively known as Dyaks (also spelled Dayaks) but divided into many sub-groups, they had no alphabet and had little that resembled a formal government. In their religion, they practiced a simple form of spirit worship that was sometimes covered with a veneer of Islam. Most of them derived their livelihood from agriculture supplemented by hunting and fishing. Their agricultural methods were very crude, resulting in frequent food shortages. They resided in small, scattered villages and often lived in community dwellings called "longhouses." At the time of the arrival of the missionaries, head-hunting was still practiced occasionally among the Dyaks. They engaged in this, however, not because of cannibalism but as a means of attaining stature in the community. The skulls were preserved and displayed as trophies and ornaments. They also believed that the soul of the victim became a protector of the slayer and his village.

The dominant group along the coast was the Malays. They were descendents of migrants who had come primarily from Sumatra and Malaya, and most of them were

adherents of Islam. The Malays engaged in various crafts as well as agriculture and commerce. A few of them lived inland, where they generally exercised an arbitrary lordship over the Dyaks. As was true throughout most of Southeast Asia, sizeable Chinese communities could also be found in Borneo. Most of the Chinese lived along or near the coast and occupied themselves as farmers and miners. Also present were a few Bugis from neighboring Celebes, who were engaged in trade, as well as a scattering of Arabs.

The Reformed missionaries were by no means the first white outsiders to visit Borneo. Portuguese and Spanish traders appeared there as early as the sixteenth century and were soon followed by other Europeans. Beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the English gradually acquired control of the coastal area in the north, while the Dutch proceeded to do the same elsewhere. The Dutch move was a natural one in view of the territory that the Netherlands already held in the East Indian archipelago. The British holdings eventually were three in number, namely, Sarawak, North Borneo (today called Sabah), and Brunei, while the Netherlands had a single colony known as Dutch Borneo (today called Kalimantan). Dutch Borneo was by far the largest political division, encompassing about three-fourths of the total land area of the island. At the time the Reformed missionaries came there, however, effective Dutch control did not yet extend very far inland.

A few Protestant missionaries had visited Dutch Borneo shortly before the arrival of the Reformed missionaries from America. Beginning in 1835, a small group began laboring in southeast Borneo in behalf of the Rhenish Missionary Society, a body that had been organized in 1828 through the merger of four German missionary associations and had heretofore concentrated on South Africa. Using Banjermasin in southeastern Borneo as its base of operations, this group labored among the Malays, Chinese and Dyaks. Only a few converts were won to Christianity, however, and these were primarily Dyaks who had become enslaved through debt and whose freedom had been purchased by the missionaries who employed them as servants.

In early 1836, William Arms, an American who earlier worked in Argentina, spent four months in the western district of Borneo as a representative of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. He returned there later in the year and was joined in March 1837 by the Reverend and Mrs. Samuel P. Robbins, who also were in the service of the American Board. Both Arms and Robbins had returned to the United States for reasons of health before the Reformed missionaries set foot in Borneo. Before departing from Batavia, however, Arms met briefly with some of the Reformed missionaries who were preparing to leave for Borneo and supplied them with information about the island and its inhabitants.

It is thus apparent that conditions on Borneo were far different from anything the missionaries had ever experienced, even during their stay at Batavia. They sent numerous communications home describing the vast differences between life in America and that in which they now found themselves. It is not likely, however, that their readers ever fully comprehended these differences, but the following analogy no doubt came closest to achieving this goal. It was written in 1847 by the Reverends

Steele and Youngblood.

> Slightly to illustrate one feature of our position, we select the distance of Albany from New York City, as representing somewhat nearly our separation from the seaboard. Paint to yourself the commercial emporium as a hut city of Asiatics, with no white inhabitants save the few employees of a foreign government—let the Hudson be as turbid as the Missouri, and as tortuous as the lower Rio Grande, and let its current set seaward with the rush of "the father of waters." Sweep from its beautiful banks, the cities, villages, and villas, and from its face the countless vehicles of commerce and travel; substituting for the one, here and there among the wild wood, a leaf-built hut, and, for the other, the rude "dug-out," paddled by a half-naked Malay, or still less encumbered Dyak. Having day unto day, in weary succession, and during some five nights, secured in your small row-boat what repose you might, amid the assaults of insect myriads and the careless song of the forest and marsh, you turn from the often dangerous Landak [River], and enter a narrow and shallow, but, when undisturbed, a crystal stream, and a few hours bring you to our forest home. That Albany may represent this, the glittering domes and heaven-piercing spires, the beauty and bustle of the capitol city must give place to bark-built dwellings and solemn solitude. Thus far, however, there has been much of magnificence, for taste may revel during hours of the upwards passage, in which no trace of man appears, but Nature reigns in grandeur. In the solitary residence you have now found, we will not enumerate the social trials known at every heathen post—memory of written experience will suggest them; we simply ask that you be busy, indoors and abroad, in a climate whose average temperature, *for day and night throughout the year,* is from one to two degrees above "summer heat" of Fahrenheit…In these circumstances you may be called to wait for religious intelligence until nearly two years after friends in Christian America have read the items for which your soul is longing. Would you appreciate the case? Let now your daily mail fail once, twice, thrice successively—and not so, merely, but let each day of weeks, months, quarters, half-years go by without letter or printed sheet, and you will but have begun to appreciate it.

This, then, was the place to which Reformed missionaries now turned their attention. The new instructions from America discussed three possible places where they might locate: Bango-Massing in the south, Borneo proper to the north, and the area between Sambas and Pontianak in the west. Because the first mentioned place was already occupied by German missionaries and the second was under the Moslems and might be unsafe because it lay beyond the pale of Dutch rule, the western district was judged as the most inviting. Moreover, as was noted, that region had

been visited for a brief period by the Reverends Arms and Robbins while under the auspices of the American Board, and the latter had expressed a willingness to relinquish the area to the Reformed missionaries if they decided to locate there. The western district also had the advantage of having a sizeable Chinese population as well as a few Malays along the coast and a large Dyak population in the interior. After selecting the western district, the missionaries next had to decide whether to locate in both coastal towns of Sambas and Pontianak or in just one of them, and whether to also locate in the interior.

Much of the planning that now took place among the missionaries occurred not at Batavia but at Singapore. This came about because Singapore had long served as a kind of headquarters for Protestant missions throughout Southeast Asia and as a source of information about new regions, such as Borneo. A religious printing press was also located at Singapore, and, of great importance, it was much easier to obtain passage and to ship supplies from there to Borneo than from Batavia. Moreover, having spent the requisite year's residence at Batavia, there was no longer any need for the missionaries to remain there, particularly since Singapore offered language training equal to what could be found at Batavia and had lower living costs.

Thus it happened that in the summer of 1838, the Reverends Doty and Youngblood went to Singapore to make preliminary plans for the proposed mission. They were joined in early autumn by two new missionaries, the Reverends Pohlman and Thomson, who had just arrived from America. These two men, with their families, had intended to continue their journey to Batavia as soon as passage could be obtained, but decided to remain at Singapore for a time upon finding Doty and Youngblood there.

In mid-October, Doty and Pohlman undertook an exploratory tour of the western district of Borneo to ascertain the best places for establishing mission stations. The fact that Pohlman made this journey is rather surprising because he had not yet set foot in Batavia and thus had not gone through the customary formality of presenting his credentials to the Dutch Governor General. The tour lasted seven weeks, three of which were spent in going to and from Borneo and four on the island. Their visit included the territory between the coastal towns of Sambas and Pontianak and extended about sixty miles inland. In all, the missionaries traveled nearly two hundred fifty miles on the island—about one hundred seventy on foot and eighty by canoe.

The tour left the missionaries with no illusions about the problems facing them: the different languages that had to be learned before the inhabitants could be reached with the Gospel; the influence of Islam, which was considered one of the greatest barriers to spreading the Christian message; the absence of roads and even of satisfactory foot paths; and the extent to which the people were scattered, especially the Dyaks.

Despite these difficulties, the missionaries reported several causes for optimism. They were treated well by everyone they visited, including the Malay officials and the Chinese headmen. Even the Dyaks, despite their cruel practice of head collecting, were reported by Doty and Pohlman as being mild and peaceful—a view the Reformed missionaries continued to hold for as long as they labored in Borneo. Nor

did other problems seem insurmountable. With respect to the Dyaks not having a written language, this meant that neither did they have any "false writings to be confuted." Similarly, although the religious system of the Chinese was reported as being the same as that of their mother country and thus backed by centuries of tradition and an extensive literature, their desire for reading material was enormous and could be turned to advantage. As reported by Doty and Pohlman:

> The learned system of the Chinese [has not] obtained such a hold as to exclude the study of other works. Only put books into the hands of the readers, and they will be perused with attention...Their anxiety to obtain our books is astonishing. We had with us a box containing several copies of the gospels and a quantity of Tracts. These were not only readily taken, but absolutely seized with eagerness, and we would have needed thousands more to supply the demand.

At about the time that Doty and Pohlman returned to Singapore on December 3, 1838, to rejoin Youngblood and Thomson, Nevius had arrived there from Batavia. Ennis would have joined the group before this but was unable because he had left a few months earlier with his wife for territory east of Java that was not subject to Dutch rule. His purpose was to investigate the possibility of establishing a mission station somewhere in that region if sufficient reinforcements should ever arrive.

Following a succession of meetings at Singapore in January 1839, the five missionaries who were present drew up final plans for the Borneo mission. Special attention was given to where each of them would locate and what their responsibilities would be. The decisions included the following: Doty and Pohlman would proceed to Sambas on a temporary basis with the intention of later locating among the Chinese at Montrado; Nevius would locate at Pontianak to work among the Chinese; Thomson and Youngblood would proceed to Pontianak as a place of temporary residence in preparation for a permanent settlement among the Dyaks of the interior—perhaps at Landak; and Ennis would locate at Pontianak with a view to working among the Malays.

These decisions were based on the hope that Pohlman and Thomson would be able to go to Borneo immediately without first spending the requisite year of residence at Batavia. In this, they were disappointed, despite an urgent letter of appeal to the Dutch Governor General from the American consul at Singapore. Nevertheless, the original plan was basically adhered to. The first Reformed missionaries to set foot on Borneo on a permanent basis were the Reverend and Mrs. Doty, who arrived at Sambas on June 17, 1839. About three months later, on September 19, the Youngbloods arrived at Pontianak, where they were joined by the Nevius family on December 3. The Ennises, who were among the original group of missionaries to arrive in the East Indies, were also supposed to locate at Pontianak but had to return to the United States by 1840 because of family troubles. Pohlman and Thomson took their assigned positions on Borneo when permitted to do so by the Dutch government.

Before turning to a discussion of the several mission stations that were established at Borneo, a brief comment should be made about expenses. Although it is impossible to be completely accurate in this matter, sufficient records are available to give a general idea regarding the main costs. In order to meet domestic needs, about $500 to $750 were required annually per family, indicating that the costs of living were low. Chickens could be had for less than one dollar a dozen, while fish, wild hog, and venison were readily available. The Reverend Steele, for example, reported shooting deer from within a stone's throw of his house. The missionaries also helped keep expenses low by growing their own vegetables and fruit. Other than flour, few basic necessities had to be ordered from the United States. Most of the items requested from the American Board's office in Boston consisted of medical supplies and school materials. Because laborers could be had for about ten cents a day and only rudimentary materials were needed for building construction, houses for the missionaries were cheap—costing about $250 in the interior and $750 at Pontianak. The higher costs in the latter instance were the result of construction problems due to the marshy soil. Education costs were also comparatively low. Native teachers were employed at Pontianak for about $300 per year, while the costs for boarding school children came to about $20 per term.

4
Early Work Among the Chinese

The Reverend William Arms, who, as noted, had made two extended visits to western Borneo in 1836-1837, reported to the Reformed missionaries that there were about 100,000 Chinese in the region they had selected for their labors. In the minds of Doty, Nevius, and Pohlman, who had been studying Chinese, Borneo therefore was a good choice for a mission station. According to the plans that had been made at Singapore, the work among the Chinese was to be concentrated at two locations: Montrado and Pontianak. As the greatest hope was held out for Montrado, two men, Doty and Pohlman, were designated for that place, while Nevius was assigned to Pontianak. As events turned out, these plans were soon greatly modified.

The plans for Montrado called for the establishment of a temporary mission at Sambas, a small coastal town inhabited by about 350 Malays, 160 Chinese, and 200 Bugis. Located at the mouth of the Sambas River, it would give access to the interior and would help the missionaries adjust themselves to Borneo conditions before moving inland to the main Chinese settlement at Montrado. A brief stay at Sambas also had other advantages: first, it would afford the missionaries an opportunity to study the dialect spoken at Montrado, which was different from the Chinese they had learned at Batavia; second, there was some uncertainty about whether the Chinese at Montrado would welcome a missionary; and third, the Dutch official in charge of the Sambas area was reported to be sympathetic toward missions. Because this official had less than a year remaining on his term of office and his successor might be less sympathetic toward missions, there was a sense of urgency about Doty's departure for Sambas. It was primarily for this reason that he left for Borneo several months before the other missionaries.

In September 1839, three months after his arrival at Sambas, Doty made his first visit to Montrado, where he approached the Chinese headman on the possibility of locating his mission there on a permanent basis. All but one of the local officials seemed to be in favor of such a move, but no one would commit himself fully. Later

requests were met with similar procrastination, with the authorities never giving a definite negative answer but always politely putting him off. Doty, however, was not discouraged. As he expressed it in a letter of March 13, 1840: "If the Lord has work for us to do at Montrado, he will open the way for the accomplishment of it."

In the meantime, Doty studied the dialect used by the Chinese at Montrado and started a small school for Chinese boys at Sambas. He also gathered as much information as possible about the interior by visiting with any Chinese who came to Sambas on business. Having a limited knowledge of the "healing arts," Doty also dispensed medicine, and as this became known, Chinese from other settlements soon began calling on him. He also made several tours inland to preach and distribute religious literature. On one such visit, he traveled about two hundred miles (120 by water and 80 on foot) and distributed six hundred religious tracts as well as several copies of the New Testament. In distributing such materials, Doty reported in August 1840:

> I have been privileged to scatter among the benighted Sons of the Celestial Empire something more than 2000 tracts and portions of scriptures. These have gone far and near, cast as bread upon the waters, sent forth as an arrow at a venture, in the prayerful hopes that in their fruits they will again be gathered. A few have also been distributed among the Malays.

By November 1840, not having yet received a favorable answer from Montrado, Doty began giving serious consideration to locating his mission at Singkawang, which also had a significant number of Chinese and was actually easier to reach than Montrado. Before taking this step, however, he decided to wait until an associate arrived to assist him, and in the meantime to continue his labors as before.

Very few of Doty's plans for working among the Chinese in the Sambas area were realized. In the summer of 1841, he was asked to close his mission there and relocate at Pontianak. This was done in part because the Neviuses, who had been responsible for the Chinese work at Pontianak, had to return to the United States in the spring of 1841 due to Mrs. Nevius' health. Because the Pontianak mission at the time appeared to have better prospects for success than the one at Sambas, the relocation of Doty seemed like a wise decision. By this time, too, the missionaries had reached the conclusion that they had been spreading themselves too thinly.

Pontianak, which was located on a navigable river fourteen miles from the coast and about fifty miles south of Sambas, was one of the most important commercial towns in western Borneo. It had a large population of Malays and several hundred Chinese, some of whom spoke the dialect that the missionaries had studied at Batavia. Moreover, the headmen among the Pontianak Chinese seemed anxious to have missionaries locate there. Pontianak also had an advantage in that it was located at the juncture of two major rivers, the Kapuas and the Landak, which, with their tributaries, would give the missionaries access to Chinese settlements near Pontianak and to the Dyaks who were located farther in the interior.

By the time the Dotys arrived at Pontianak in early August 1841, a missionary complex of several buildings had already been constructed. It was located near the Chinese part of the city and adjoined the buildings that housed the Dutch colonial authorities. Because it was close to the river, it provided easy communication with travelers. The arrival of Doty was a welcome relief for Youngblood who, since Nevius' departure, had been trying to combine work among the Chinese with his regular labors among the Malay people. Shortly after Doty put in an appearance, the missionary staff at Pontianak was further increased by the arrival of the Reverend and Mrs. Pohlman from Batavia.

Pohlman had come to the East Indies already in late 1838, more than two and one-half years before he arrived at Pontianak. One can therefore well ask, What had he been doing in the meantime and why did he not go to Borneo earlier? The explanation lies primarily in the fact that discussions had been going on for some time about establishing a Reformed mission at Batavia. In such an event, Pohlman, together with Thomson, who had arrived with him, would staff it. When the plan was finally dropped, Pohlman departed for Borneo and was followed about six months later by Thomson.

Pohlman's long stay at Batavia and his having concentrated on learning Chinese proved to be excellent preparation for what now lay ahead of him. He freely admitted, however, that it would be a long time before he could be considered an accomplished Sinologist. In late 1840, he wrote:

> I am confident it will still require many years of study and intercourse with the people before I shall be qualified to preach in the language. At the same time we have made a beginning, and if God should now permit us to be thrown into a colony of pure Chinese, we could succeed in the ordinary transactions of life. Yet this is very far from knowing much of the language. When we can converse readily on moral and religious subjects, and get at the minds of the people, and find out their objections and answer them, then and not until then will we be fitted for our high vocation.

The number of Chinese residing in Pontianak when Pohlman and Doty began their work in August 1841 was estimated at about 1200, with another 800 living within a few miles of the town. Several thousand more Chinese lived along the coast and were easily accessible by boat. Most of the Chinese were engaged in farming and gold mining. Unlike those in Java, they did not mingle much with other people but kept more to themselves. As a consequence, according to the missionaries, they resembled more closely the Chinese of the mother country in their habits than did those on Java. The preservation of Chinese customs on Borneo was further accentuated by the annual immigrant traffic occurring between that place and China. The missionaries reported that three or four Chinese junks arrived each year, usually in February, bringing in new immigrants and returning a few Chinese who had accumulated enough wealth to retire in their native land.

At a time when China proper was closed to the West, the Chinese junks and their returning passengers were looked upon as a possible means for sending "religious truth" into the heart of the Chinese homeland itself, although admittedly it was not the best method.

> It is true we do not place the greatest confidence in this mode of indirect and partial labor among the heathen—for they need the voice of the living teacher and "line upon line and precept upon precept"—but when there are persons so situated who cannot be benefited in any other way, it is well to attempt something like this.

Because China was forced as a result of the first Opium War to open its doors to the West soon after the Borneo mission was established, it is not likely that the missionaries followed this particular method of proselyting very long.

One of the first questions that had to be resolved by the Chinese mission at Pontianak concerned the choice of a dialect. The possibilities were three: Hokkeen, Toe Ch'hew, and Khek. Hokkeen was quickly ruled out because only a few Chinese used it and because it resembled Toe Ch'hew sufficiently so that a person who had some acquaintance with the one could make himself understood, at least to a degree, by anyone using the other.Upon being further informed that the Khek dialect was used almost exclusively in the interior and that most Toe Ch'hew children went to Khek schools, while the reverse was seldom the case, the missionaries decided to concentrate on the Khek dialect.

On Sundays, the missionaries took turns preaching to the Chinese at the mission compound in Pontianak. They also took turns preaching there on certain weekday evenings. The average attendance at the Sunday services was about thirty. Pupils who were enrolled in the mission school were expected to be present as were the Chinese teachers and others employed by the mission. Without this "captive audience," those in attendance would generally have been much smaller—frequently not more than a half-dozen. There were times, however, when the number of hearers was much larger, sometimes as many as sixty or seventy. This occurred during brisk trading seasons when many Chinese boatmen and merchants came to Pontianak from surrounding settlements. In explaining their presence on such occasions, one of the missionaries reported, "Curiosity to hear a foreigner stammer in their own language, probably more than anything else, operates to call them together."

From the time of their arrival, the missionaries intended to make the mission schools a major center of influence. As an immediate goal, it was hoped that by working through the children, the missionaries could gain the confidence of the parents. It was further hoped that when the children grew up, they would become an important means for informing others about the work of the missionaries, and especially so if the children themselves became converts.

In placing emphasis on the youth, the missionaries were simply following advice that had frequently been given them by others. The Netherlands Missionary Society, for example, in a letter of October 25, 1836, addressed to the Board of Foreign

Missions, emphasized the importance of founding schools and working among the youth in order to implant Christianity in the islands. "The efforts and the impressions of a moment cannot reach this object," wrote the Society, "and we see not how the Heathen nations can become Christian without a continued residence and constant labor among the rising generation."

It is therefore not surprising that as soon as the missionaries had settled at Pontianak they rented a building to serve as a schoolhouse and employed a Khek teacher for six hours a day to work with Chinese boys. Later, a boarding school, in which the children lived in one of the missionary houses, was made a part of the day school. The number of boys in attendance varied from about five to fifteen, and their ages ranged from seven to fourteen. At first, in order to keep expenses low, the mission paid only one-half of the wages of the Chinese teacher, with the remainder being paid by the parents. The latter acceded to this because it was still less than what it would have cost them in their own schools.

The lack of satisfactory schoolbooks was a major problem facing the missionaries. They therefore often had to compose their own. Thus, Pohlman wrote in January, 1843:

> For some months of the year we have been engaged in preparing school books—such as a translation [into Chinese] of Brown's Catechism, First Lessons in Natural Philosophy, a Catechism of Scripture History, and Questions on the Gospel of Matthew. These we have no means of printing, but have ordered several copies to be written out for the use of the children.

Considerable difficulty was experienced in providing education for the girls. Although the practice of female education was not uncommon at Batavia (perhaps because the Chinese of that place mixed more with other people and were less attached to the mores of the mother country), education for girls was frowned upon by the Chinese of Borneo. When approached on the subject of female education, the common retort of the parents was: "What! can females read books?" The remarks were invariably uttered in a tone of voice and with a look of surprise that left the missionaries in little doubt regarding how the matter was viewed. Not only did the fathers question the need for female education but so did the mothers and especially the grandmothers. The common view was that girls should remain at home and learn domestic duties and prepare themselves to be good wives and mothers.

Despite such reactions, Miss Condict, who had acquired some experience in teaching Chinese girls during her "internship" on Java, soon set about establishing a school for Chinese girls and quickly acquired a few pupils. Indeed, when on June 1, 1842, a boarding school for Chinese girls was started with one scholar, it had five more within a few weeks. When Miss Condict left Pontianak, the Pohlmans became primarily responsible for this school. In early 1843, a large house was specially erected for the girls. It was divided into three sections—a school room, a large bedroom, and

a kitchen and dining room. This became their home, and they were required to keep it clean under penalty of being disciplined. Two of the girls, by turns, tended to the preparation of meals, consisting largely of rice, vegetables, and fish.

The primary purpose of the schools was the salvation of the souls of the children. "My aim," wrote Doty on August 17, 1843, "is to make all their studies have a moral bearing upon their minds." It is therefore not surprising that school days were opened and closed with prayer and singing religious songs. Bible history and some elementary catechetical instruction were also parts of the daily curriculum. Children who were boarders were also expected to spend a brief period each evening with one of the missionaries before retiring, at which time one of the older pupils would lead the group in extemporaneous prayer after which the Lord's Prayer would be recited in unison—all in Chinese. The daily curriculum also included about six hours of practical subjects, including English and arithmetic, which were taught by the missionaries themselves, and Chinese. Native teachers were employed to teach the children to read and write in their own language. With reference to teaching English, the missionaries declared that without it, the Chinese would always find it difficult to communicate with foreigners. Moreover, a knowledge of English would give them "stores of knowledge they do not [now] possess in their own tongue."

Despite all the hard work that the missionaries put into the schools and the mission church, together with visiting the Chinese and distributing religious tracts in the streets of Pontianak and neighboring settlements, they were unable to win a single convert. As Doty reported to the Classis of Schoharie in the latter part of 1842:

> Our message seems to have fallen upon the ears of our hearers as an empty, at best a novel tale. Our most solemn and earnest appeals come lifeless to the heathen heart. We are constantly made to feel the most in our power is to plant and water. Of our auditors, many politely hear, acknowledge the truth of our doctrine, say it is all good, and go their way. Others more rude and reckless, ridicule our message, laugh us to scorn, and in effect exclaim, "What do these babblers say? Will they turn the world upside down?"

Even among the older pupils, who were reported as having "a pretty good theoretical knowledge of the great and vital doctrines of Christianity. . . [and knew] the truth and their duty," the missionaries reported seeing "no evidence of any saving influence on their hearts." Although they generally manifested seriousness when listening to the gospel, the missionaries reported that the interest dissipated as quickly "as the morning cloud and the early dew."

In trying to explain why they could see so little "to cheer their hearts" after having "scattered the seed of the gospel" with so much effort, the missionaries pointed to several obstacles. The strong influence of ancient traditions, especially the Confucian system of morals and ethics, created barriers that only time and patience could break. Another major deterrent was the realization by the Chinese that if any one of them became a convert, he or she would immediately be shunned by other Chinese and

looked upon as ungrateful and unfilial. Although the missionaries had never witnessed such ostracism at Pontianak, they had observed it at Java, where they declared it to be a sad and pitiful sight. The missionaries also attributed their lack of success to the overriding interest that the Chinese showed in pecuniary matters, which never allowed them to take one day out of the week to pursue spiritual matters. The fact that some of the Chinese spoke a dialect different from what the missionaries had learned at Batavia was also somewhat of a hindrance.

Discouragement over lack of success, especially in view of the strenuous efforts that were put forth and the daily discomforts that had to be tolerated, would have caused men of lesser faith to loose heart, but such was not the case with the Borneo missionaries. As explained by Doty in his letter of September 20, 1842, to the Classis of Schoharie:

> Some brother, perhaps, may be ready to raise the question, under such circumstances [with] so little doing, so small fruits at such an expense of time, strength, and money—yes, of life too, "What is there to encourage you to persevere? Is not your life worth too much to be spent in teaching a dozen boys, of whom you have no certainty they will ever appreciate your labor or become Christians? In preaching the gospel to a handful of Chinese, who perhaps will never hear you a second time, but will regard you as a mere babbler—to be pitied rather than respected—and your message as an unmeaning story? In short, have you not already done and sacrificed too much, apparently for nothing, and had you not better abandon the field and enterprise at once?" To such inquiries. . .perhaps nothing satisfactory can be said. But the warm-hearted, zealous Christian, influenced as much and more by what he <u>believes</u> as by what he <u>sees,</u> I think may find enough to satisfy his mind.

Using this kind of reasoning, the Reverend Doty further pointed out that if numbers of converts had been considered to be the overriding factor, then the Greenland mission would have been relinquished long ago because the laborers there toiled seven long, difficult years without any "visible fruits." The same could be said about Brainerd's work among the Indians of New Jersey and the work of the London Missionary Society in the Society Islands. Even the Ceylon Mission, declared Doty, "with its rich harvest of fruit," would today "be a blank on the page of ecclesiastical history."

Unfortunately, as will be discussed in a later chapter, the Reformed Church discontinued the Chinese branch of the Borneo mission after a few years. This occurred soon after China's defeat by the British in the First Opium War (1839-1842). In accord with various treaties that followed this war, China was forced to open her doors to Western countries, including their missionaries. Upon receiving this news, it was decided that China rather than Borneo would be a more fruitful field for missionaries like Doty and Pohlman who had been trained in the Chinese language.

5
Work Among the Malays

In addition to laboring among the Chinese, the Reformed missionaries were interested in spreading the Christian gospel among the Malays. According to early estimates, about six thousand Malays lived at Pontianak, while several more smaller villages were found along the coast and along the rivers. Most of the Malays were Moslem and were engaged in various economic pursuits, including trading, crafts and farming. Some of them who lived inland exercised an overlordship over the Dyaks, from whom they exacted various forms of tribute.

A serious blow was experienced by the Pontianak mission when the Ennises had to leave for America at about the time the Borneo mission was just getting started. This was particularly unfortunate because although all the missionaries learned some Malay, the Reverend Ennis quickly surpassed the others in proficiency. Indeed, by the mid-summer of 1838, he had already achieved a degree of success in translating short elementary works into Malay and was even doing some preaching in the language. Yet, like Pohlman with his Chinese studies, Ennis was not entirely pleased with his progress. As he reported to the Classis of Bergen on August 1, 1838:

> My performances were of course very imperfect, and I began to feel very deeply the need of possessing better means of becoming acquainted with the Malay language than we possessed at Batavia. It is very simple and abstract in its construction, but this greatly increases the difficulty in expressing a variety of shades of connected trains of thought. The best dictionary contains only one-fourth of the words; and in different parts of the Archipelago it is somewhat mixed with local languages, so that immediate attention to the best sources was necessary in order to learn what was a local peculiarity, and what was pure Malay which may be understood and employed in different [regions].

About a year before the above letter was written, Ennis, determined to improve his knowledge of Malay, obtained what was known as a "sea pass," permitting him

to visit Sumatra to confer with a Mr. Ward of the English Missionary Society. Ward, who had studied the language for nearly twenty years, had compiled, in manuscript form, a dictionary of between forty and fifty thousand words. The journey also enabled Ennis to carry on considerable exploration of the interior of Sumatra. He left on June 27, 1837, and did not return until December—a journey of six months. He made the circuit on foot and by canoe, covering more than three hundred miles and traversing some territory never before visited by anyone from the western countries. Despite the numerous problems encountered, including a lengthy illness that brought him close to death, Ennis reported that his interview with Ward more than compensated him for the length and hardships of the journey and that he gained considerable information concerning missionary opportunities.

While at Batavia, Ennis had also made a careful search for religious works written in the Malay tongue, and in April 1837 issued a list of some forty such works. The list included not only translations of Scripture and various books of the Bible but also psalms and hymns, catechisms, sermons, and brief religious tracts dealing with a variety of subjects, including the Ten Commandments, the parables and miracles of Jesus, and the nature of sin. Unfortunately, most of these works were in classical Malay, which differed significantly from the everyday Malay used by the man in the street.

It is thus obvious why Ennis, because of his training, was the logical choice to work among the Malays at Pontianak and why his leaving was such a serious blow. With his departure, the task of working among the Malays devolved upon the Reverend Youngblood, who had arrived at Pontianak on September 19, 1839. His stay at that place, however, was intended to be temporary—to last only until plans could be finalized for his settlement among the Dyaks in the interior. Hopefully, by that time someone would have arrived to take over his work among the Malays.

As was true with the Chinese, missionary work among the Malays concentrated on the youth. Youngblood opened a school for Malay boys and soon had several in attendance, including four boarders. Later with the assistance of Mrs. Youngblood, a school for girls was also started. The curriculum was virtually the same as in the Chinese school except that Malay was substituted for Chinese. Because a competent Malay teacher could not be found, Youngblood undertook all the teaching by himself, a task that occupied him about six hours daily. As an aid to his teaching, he immediately began preparing an elementary textbook in Malay for the use of his pupils.

In addition to his teaching duties, Youngblood held regular religious services in Malay on Sunday afternoons in the schoolhouse, and distributed small religious tracts among the people who seemed able to read them with at least some degree of understanding. At the request of the local Dutch military commander, Youngblood also began holding special Sunday services in Malay for the approximately thirty-five European soldiers and the half dozen Dutch families residing at Pontianak. The services were poorly attended, however, and were apparently terminated quite soon. Concerning the Europeans at Pontianak, Youngblood wrote:

> We have no reason to believe that a single individual [among them] has the fear of God before his eyes. The sacred hours of the Sabbath are spent by them in exercises in books, visiting, drinking and kindred amusements. All are unfriendly, and perhaps I might add in truth opposed to missionary efforts among the heathen, especially among the Mohammedans and Dyaks.

Progress among the Malays was slow, just as it was among the Chinese. In 1842, Youngblood wrote: "As yet, no one of the perishing thousands around us has come out on the Lord's side; nor are there any, as far as we know, who are seriously inquiring about the way of salvation." The Malay school at this time had only fifteen pupils, about half of whom were girls, and attendance at the Sunday services was also low, averaging about twenty. As was the case with the Chinese, about the only persons in attendance were the school children and the Malays in the employ of the mission, together with a few who were attracted by the novelty of the proceedings.

In explaining this lack of success, Youngblood stated what others were also saying, namely, that the Moslems on Borneo, meaning virtually all the Malays, were the most bigoted of any people found living in the archipelago. He added:

> None of the higher classes can be prevailed upon to send their children to our schools, and seem to fear far less their being guilty of all vices of heathenism than that they should be under the instruction of missionaries. And as regards young and old, such is their disregard to the truth of the Gospel. . .that it is rare that an individual is to be found who will listen with any apparent degree of interest to it a second time—while nearly all will sit for hours, and listen attentively to a narration of the foolish legends and tales contained in their [Islamic] books.

But like Pohlman and Doty in their labors among the Chinese, Youngblood's spirits and hopes for the future remained high.

> True, it is a day of small things with regard to us as a mission; but as small as it is, we in the field are not disheartened, and we hope our patrons and the Church will not despise it. When we review the history of the past, we find that often the most astonishing and momentous events have originated from very small beginnings, and have been carried forward by instrumentality the most feeble. Resting on the promises of the God of truth, we desire to go forward in the path of duty and the numerous trials and discouragements by which we are surrounded. The leadings of Providence seemed very marked in bringing us to this island; and we humbly trust that our having been brought here will not have been in vain. Even if we should not see any fruit of our labors, but

> should only be the means of preparing the way for others to enter in and reap a rich harvest, it ought to afford matter of rejoicing to ourselves and others.

In February 1842, the Reverend Thomson arrived at Pontianak to assist Youngblood in his work among the Malays and to later accompany him into the interior to labor among the Dyaks. His coming to Borneo so late—more than three years after he arrived in the archipelago—requires, like Pohlman's late arrival, a brief explanation. After sailing from New York on May 25, 1838 in the company of Pohlman, Thomson arrived at Singapore in mid-September. As was noted, he and Pohlman had hoped to go directly to Borneo without having to spend the required year's residency on Java. Unfortunately, this was not permitted, and they left Singapore for Batavia in early 1839.

As his required year's stay at Batavia neared an end, Thomson began making plans for his departure to Borneo. The sudden death of his wife on November 16, 1839, changed these plans. Being left with two small, motherless children, he thought it best to remain at Batavia a while longer. His stay was prolonged again when he remarried on December 9, 1840. His new wife, the former Miss Emma Cecilia Combe from Berne, Switzerland, had arrived at Batavia a short time earlier under the auspices of the Female Missionary Society of Geneva. Following their marriage, the newly-united couple proceeded to establish a girl's boarding school and soon had fourteen children from ages six to twelve under their care.

Because Mrs. Thomson had the principal charge of the school, the Reverend Thomson had time for other missionary endeavors. In September 1841, he wrote the Classis of Poughkeepsie:

> Although I have not yet put anything to press, because in the present state of our operations it seems peculiarly important. . . to "make haste slowly," yet I have been enabled to lay up materials which I confidently hope, if my life is spared, may ere long be turned to some good account. I have also kept up a regular Sabbath exercise in our house, to explain and enforce the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and in the campong, and from house to house. I have endeavored to improve all other opportunities of usefulness by the distribution of tracts and personal conversation with individuals, families, and other small collections of people.

In the light of all this activity, it is not surprising that Thomson began giving some thought to remaining at Batavia. Indeed, in his correspondence he strongly hinted that the Reformed Church should consider establishing a permanent mission there. The possibility of this suddenly changed, however, when the school was closed by order of the Dutch colonial government and the Thomsons were told that if they wished to continue their missionary endeavors, they would have to do so on the island of Borneo.

As was typical among the missionaries when plans had to be altered, Thomson interpreted what had taken place as being a providential arrangement. In another letter to the Classis of Poughkeepsie, he wrote:

> I have nothing to say here with regard to this piece of the Resident's policy. The fact may speak for itself. We, as concerns ourselves, can consider it in no other light than as a voice from Heaven, just as if, like Paul, we had seen a vision, a man of Borneo saying, "Come over and help us." "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another." We are therefore not grieved at all, but rather rejoice—rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the Saviour's name, and rejoice especially that God deals with us so gently, and yet shows the way we should go so clearly.

Thomson, like Ennis, had concentrated primarily on learning Malay during his stay at Batavia. If he had stayed at Pontianak, he no doubt could have been of great benefit to the Malay mission there because of his proficiency in the language. The following communication written in September 1840, a year and one-half before he set foot on Borneo, indicates how far he had already advanced in Malay by that date.

> I have translated tract No. 45, a publication of the American Tract Society, "On Christian Atonement." In addition to this, I have nearly completed a mental Arithmetic on the plan of Colburn's First Lessons, which I hope will be of essential service wherever we may establish Malay schools, and perhaps somewhat facilitate its introduction into the languages of the Archipelago. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, school books will be an important desideratum.

He had also written a tract in Malay, which he hoped to publish, on the evil effects of opium. This effort was prompted by his chance discovery of his Malay teacher, whom he had been privately instructing in the principles of Christianity, in an opium shop.

As has been noted, the work of Youngblood and Thomson among the Malays at Pontianak was intended from the beginning to be temporary. According to the plans reached at Singapore in late 1838, before the Reformed missionaries had started their work on Borneo, these two men were assigned the task of laboring among the Dyaks of the interior—plans of which they never lost sight. In December 1840, Youngblood wrote from Pontianak:

> There is nothing yet in the providence of God which would seem to say, this is not the time for putting forth some efforts for the Dyaks. Our minds are anxiously exercised as to what is duty, whether to remain in this place, or to go alone into the interior. Were it not for the children, I

> think I would urge our going as far at least as Pyam, about four days up the Kapuas River. The number of Dyaks is not great there, but still a person could find essential employment if access could be had to them.

The Reverends William Theodore Van Doren and Isaac P. Stryker, both of whom graduated from New Brunswick Seminary in 1840, and had arrived at Batavia in March 1841, were designated as replacements for the Malay mission at Pontianak. Unfortunately, Van Doren had to return to the United States, due to poor health, before completing his residency requirement at Batavia, and Stryker died on March 27, 1842, just a few days before he was to depart from that city for Borneo. Although no replacements arrived for Youngblood and Thomson, the decision was nevertheless made to go ahead with plans for working in the interior. As Pohlman wrote from Pontianak to the Reverend Thomas De Witt of the Board of Foreign Missions on April 15, 1842: "If God had permitted us to carry out our plans, we hoped to keep up the school and Malay preaching here—but with our present forces this seems impossible. The perishing Dyaks have the first claim."

The closing of the Malay mission at Pontianak occurred in the summer of 1842. As described later by Youngblood in a letter to the *Christian Intelligencer*, the Reformed Church's denominational paper, "This was a painful event to me, for although small, it had cost me much time and labor to collect, keep together, and instruct." He had hoped that a few of his most promising pupils would accompany him to this new station among the Dyaks, but with one exception, this failed to transpire. The parents and guardians of the children declared it was too far and the region too unhealthy. The exception was a Dyak boy who was the slave of a wealthy Chinaman and had made considerable progress in his studies under Youngblood. It was hoped that in due time the lad would become a "valuable assistant" to the new mission. Unfortunately, he soon had a change of heart and remained with Youngblood and Thomson for only a brief period in their new location among the Dyaks

6
The Dyaks

Soon after Thomson arrived at Pontianak on February 4, 1842 and got his family settled, he and Youngblood embarked on a tour of the interior to learn more about the character and habits of the Dyaks and to select a suitable place for a permanent mission. They left on April 6 and traveled together for about one month, after which Youngblood, to save on costs and to look after his Malay mission, returned to Pontianak. Thomson continued to journey for another month, returning to Pontianak on June 8.

Thomson kept a daily journal of the tour, recording in detail his observations of the Dyaks and their way of life and describing the territory through which the missionaries passed. As is true of all Thomson's writings, whether they be lengthy accounts to the Board of Foreign Missions or short letters to friends back home, his journal is written in a colorful and imaginative prose that make it a pleasure to read. As a typical example, there is the entry for May 16 describing the village of Malaya as he observed it shortly after arrival:

> This village is finely situated in the bosom of a lovely vale, encompassed with hills and rising grounds, and watered by a beautiful limpid stream, whose water, collected from the neighboring heights, creeps smoothly over its sandy bed, affording a constant fountain of nature's purest element, always fresh and always fit for the various purposes of life.

Equally heart-stirring is the entry for the following day, describing Thomson's departure from the village:

> This was a calm, cheerful morning, and we were enabled to set out at that interesting point when nature first begins to dress herself in loveliness. Day had just drawn aside the curtain of repose and shed her smile of golden lustre on everything around. The feathered inhabitants of the grove saluted us, as we went forth, with their earliest lays, soft, sweet

and harmonious to the ear. The whole scene was enchanting.

The two missionaries were generally well-received wherever they went. At the village of Tinggolong, Thomson was welcomed with music and the firing of a small cannon, after which he was conducted to a special seat that had been covered with gaudy cloth, and placed beneath a canopy overlaid with finely-woven mats. On a few occasions, as at Saretok, the entire village—men, women, and children—turned out. Sometimes the missionaries were welcomed with food, such as a portion of rice, a few eggs, a pumpkin, some cucumbers, or some coconut water. The giving of such things, even in small amounts, was a sacrifice for the Dyaks as they were invariably short of food. On receiving these gifts, the missionaries reciprocated with presents of their own.

There were occasions, however, when their reception was less than pleasant. Some Dyaks ran away in terror at the approach of the missionaries. In a few instances, as at Gre, the villagers were so inattentive and disrespectful that the missionaries had to give up trying to converse with them. Such instances, though, were the exception and were generally the result of Malay opposition. Some of the Malays feared that the Islamic religion and their privileged position as overlords of the Dyaks might be threatened by the presence of the missionaries. But even the Malays at times were friendly. For example, among those at Padang the missionaries were able to distribute a considerable number of gospels as well as copies of the book of Job and numerous small tracts. Even the local official in charge was pleased to accept a "fair copy" of the Bible in Malay.

Youngblood and Thomson were very pleased with what they had observed during their tour among the Dyaks. In a letter written soon after his return to Pontianak, Thomson informed the American Board and the denominational Board of Foreign Missions:

> We are fully satisfied that there is nothing to prevent us from settling, with our families, immediately in the midst of these interesting people, and teaching them without reserve the principles of the doctrine of Christ… They almost universally expressed the utmost willingness, if not the strongest desire, to receive teachers; and some at least of their rulers professed to entertain the same feelings.

Upon returning from their tour, Thomson and Youngblood began making plans for establishing a permanent mission among the Dyaks—the last mission to be organized by the Reformed Church in Borneo and the last to be abandoned. For seven long years (1842-1849), the Reformed missionaries toiled diligently and devotedly among these people, enduring untold hardships and innumerable heartaches. It is therefore appropriate, before giving a detailed account of this new mission, to describe the Dyaks—their customs, their means of livelihood, their religious beliefs, and so forth. The best way to approach this matter is to let the missionaries speak for

themselves, as their writings, especially those by Thomson, contain considerable information on these subjects.

As to their physical appearance, Thomson described the Dyaks as resembling the Malays in some ways while differing from them in others.

> Their color is substantially the same, varying from a light tawny to a deep brown, approaching black; though our own observations would lead us to the conclusion that there are among the Dyaks more frequent and decided instances of light complexion, approaching fair… Among the Malays we do not remember to have seen any thing of this kind. The hair of the Dyaks, too, more frequently departs from a decided black, and often takes a rather light auburn hue, and while, in a majority of cases, it is perfectly straight, there are not wanting persons, not to say, families, whose heads are adorned with the finest ringlets.

The apparel worn by the Dyaks consisted of as little as possible, except when adorned for festive occasions or when traveling.

> The men wear a narrow, cloth, bound tight around their loins, generally of bark, but sometimes, especially when they wish to appear a little better than common, of some kind of cotton manufacture, together with a head-piece, either of the forementioned materials, or else something in the shape of our plainest handkerchiefs; the latter, of course, an imported article. The principal, or rather, the only visual garment of the women, is a sort of apron, from two to three feet wide, enwrapping the same part of the body, but suspended by a girdle of various descriptions, from the simplest cord to the broad, glittering belt, ornamented with a profusion of bright rings, or perhaps quite as frequently, with copper or silver coins. The hair of both sexes, is, for the most part worn long, and twisted into a peculiar kind of knot behind the head. The men sometimes shave their hair to the breadth of perhaps two inches round the forehead and behind the ears, and occasionally also the entire head. The women, so far as we have seen, seldom wear any covering on the head. Children commonly run naked till they are from six to ten years old.

Although the Dyaks were generally scantily clad, both old and young were fond of decorating their clothing and wearing ornaments. The latter often consisted of strings of teeth (both animal and human), sea shells, and beads (for those who could afford them). Both men and women wore these on their wrists and ankles. Thomson's description of the Dyaks of the village of Malaya is particularly informative on these points:

> In addition to the usual profusion of ornaments, they take no little pains in flowering their clothes, which are made altogether of the bark of trees. This is done by printing, for which they have regularly cut blocks. They have also a practice of making immense holes in their ears, stretching them out to the utmost of their capacity, and sometimes, it would seem, beyond, for I saw several which had evidently been broken by the process. In these holes they wear either blocks or rings of wood, nearly the size of a dollar in circumference. The blocks too are variously ornamented and often set with fine wire in a very tasteful manner, such as I should hardly have attributed to Dyak workmanship, if I had not been assured of the fact. One man, a youth of handsome features and fair complexion, had actually set his own front teeth with brass wire in a most fanciful way, which made them appear as if inlaid with gold.

What about the role of women and what was their relationship to their husbands? Again, Thomson gives us a keen insight into this aspect of Dyak society:

> In the management of…public matters, of course, the men alone are brought into view. What secret influence, if any, females have in directing and controlling such affairs, we are not at present prepared to say. But in respect to labor and employment, they are placed very much on an equality with men. While the latter lead the way in most of the severer outdoor employments, the former follow closely on, in the field and the forest, on land and on water…But of common drudgery, from which we would naturally suppose women ought of right to be excused, the greater part seems to be imposed, either by consent or custom, upon them, without the shadow of relief. Such are the gathering, cutting, and carting—that is, on their backs—of firewood, fetching water, winnowing and hulling *padi*, and pounding rice for flour. On the other hand, men are not infrequently found nursing or carrying children, and preparing and cooking rice, vegetables and other provisions and condiments for food. . . .
>
> Marriage usually takes place at a very early age—here, as nearly as we can judge, from 14 to 17…The engagement appears always to be negotiated by the parents, or by them in connection with the head-man. Here also the contract appears to be considered religious as well as civil, and is solemnized with corresponding ceremonies…Divorce is painfully present, but we have never heard of a case of polygamy…Adultery, and probably every other form of uncleanness, is fearfully common. The men claim the barbarous right of beating their wives, but it is a question with us whether they practice it to the extent to which the Malays do.

> Perhaps the circumstance of their living with the parents of the woman exerts a restraining influence upon them. Whether heartfelt attachment prevails in any considerable degree, is extremely doubtful.

The Dyaks were nearly always in poor economic straits. This came about in part from their being wedded to the antiquated farming methods of their ancestors, methods that they were loath to change despite suggestions from the missionaries. Agricultural tools were likewise crude and outdated. The conditions that prevailed in the Dyak agricultural system is clearly shown in the following communication from Thomson:

> Notwithstanding the Dyaks, as already remarked, make agriculture almost their exclusive dependence for a livelihood, yet they never thoroughly clear the land which they till, much less attempt to keep it subdued. As they seek no more than a single crop from the same tract, it is left, immediately after the grain is harvested, to grow up again as wild as nature can; and hence, though they themselves are not so migratory in their habits as has sometimes been represented, their farms, if they may be so called, are never stationary. They cut down a new piece of wood every successive year, burn the lighter branches and leaves, and as much of the timber as such a general conflagration will consume, and then, without ploughing, spading or hoeing the ground, plant their rice…One consequence of this is, that a Dyak rice-field is almost invariably strewed with logs, stumps, and trees partially burnt and lying in the utmost disorder.

Several times in their correspondence to missionary boards and fellow ministers in the United States, the Borneo missionaries, in their pleas for reinforcements, asked that one or more lay persons with a knowledge of farming be sent to assist those who were working among the Dyaks. In 1842, Pohlman wrote to De Witt:

> We shall have to teach the Dyaks everything, even the commonest principles of husbandry. They know nothing—are the simplest children of nature in the world. Can you not send us some pious young men and women? Are there no young farmers, ready to spend and be spent for God among the heathen? . . .One missionary, accompanied by a lay brother, might be stationed at each of the places now open. As it is, Brs. Thomson and Youngblood must go alone, and bear burdens, and engage in toils which ought to devolve on some of the youth in our native land. Who will come to their help? Again and again have we called for a Physician and Printer, and to no purpose. Shall the call now made also be in vain? Where is the love of Jesus, and of souls? Let young mechanics, merchants, and farmers in our Church—let every one qualified to

> instruct poor heathen, ask, "Is it not my duty to go up to the help of the perishing Dyaks?"

As a consequence of agricultural methods such as the above, rice and vegetable production was low. "Our nearest neighbors," wrote Steele in 1847, "more than 3/4 of them perhaps never raise enough rice to allow themselves food from it for 8 full months of the year." Adding to the Dyaks' problems was their failure to see the need for economizing so that they would have something to keep them going between harvests. During lean times, they had to rely on leaves and roots for food or borrow from rapacious moneylenders at five per cent interest per month. This meant that at harvest time, in addition to having to turn over part of their crop to Malay overlords, a sizeable amount might also have to go to those from whom the Dyaks had borrowed. They therefore seldom had enough food to last them until the next harvest and so the process would be repeated again.

It is not surprising that the missionaries were often asked for "hand-outs," especially for salt, rice, and fruit. Of the latter, the missionaries were well supplied, as they maintained a garden and orchard of several acres. In late August 1847, Steele declared: "I am probably within the truth in saying that, from the blessing of Providence upon the gardens, I have since June 1st, personally given to a throng of applicants more than half a ton of fruit, viz., pine apples & plantain." (Plantain was a kind of banana plant.) In reference to begging by the Dyaks, Steele added:

> Had a notch been made upon the window sills of the central hall [from which the Dyaks frequently called to the missionaries inside the dwelling] for each tenth repetition of *heuteukn ko sabeureuk, kai man sa leupn*, and *men dawou bukatn kai neyuga ko sa*, every available nick must long ere this, have been sadly scratched.

Dyak villages were small and scattered—generally about five miles apart. Most villages consisted of one or two "long houses," each divided into rooms or apartments and accommodating from fifteen to twenty families. The buildings were constructed on pilings or stilts so that the floors were a few feet off the ground. One part of each long house was considered communal property and it was here that the Dyaks carried on such crafts as sewing, making mats, and fashioning and repairing tools and weapons. The center of the building was reserved for the village headmen, and when a missionary came to call and planned to spend the night, it was a breach of etiquette if he did not pitch his tent in front of the headman's residence.

Together with their antiquated methods of agriculture, the missionaries found it difficult to comprehend the often untidy and squalid appearance of the Dyak homes and villages. Note, for example, Youngblood's description of Sangku, which was located a short distance from the missionaries' permanent mission at Karangan:

> This place, with American or European skill and industry, might be

> made in many respects one of the most inviting spots in this part of the world. The kampong itself, however, is one of the most filthy and forbidding places imaginable. Their swine and fowls are kept under their dwellings, and the filth is never removed, but is constantly accumulating. The grass and weeds are suffered to grow around their houses, even to the ladders by which they ascend, without ever being cut down. Their apartments are seldom if ever cleaned in any way, and the dust from without, and the ashes from the fires within, constantly accumulate wherever they can find a resting place. Thus the people live from year to year in filth and poverty, and most of them apparently contented with their lot.

Because the eating of pork was taboo among the Moslem Malays, the latter were not apt to confiscate pigs from the Dyaks as tribute. This fact prompted the following interesting comment from Thomson and Steele respecting Dyak sanitary habits: "There is but one species of property, as they have been heard to say, which they can possess with safety—that is, swine; and it would almost seem as if they thought the nearer they could assimilate themselves to this animal, the more secure they must be."

Village government among the Dyaks was highly patriarchal, giving the appearance of one great family. Parents exercised power over their individual households and the aged elders did the same over the community as a whole. Appeals could be made to a council made up of persons from some neighboring village or to some local superior Dyak chief, and even as a last resort to the Malay overlords. Appeals, however, were infrequent because decisions were generally handed down only after careful inquiries had been made about the case at hand and after extensive deliberations. Like so many Dyak customs, forms of chastisement for misbehavior appeared strange to the missionaries. As explained by Thomson:

> Punishments for crime consist almost exclusively of fees and commutations. These, however, are so insignificant as scarcely to deserve naming, and, where there is strong inducements to transgression, can exert but little efficacy in the way of restraint. Even the greatest adultery would probably not cost the offender the sum of five dollars, and this may be commuted into a collection of old rubbish in the shape of household furniture. The penalty for murder is death only when the perpetrator or his friends are unable to advance an equivalent to about thirty-five or forty dollars.

Of all the Dyak customs, the missionaries naturally found the practice of headhunting (Steele once called it "scalping below the chin") the most revolting. The first Reformed missionaries to visit the Dyaks, Pohlman and Doty, in recounting their exploratory tour of Borneo in 1838, gave the following account of this hideous custom:

> The only feature in their character which stamps it at once with barbarous cruelty, is the bloody practice of cutting off, and preserving with sacred care, the heads of other Dyaks, who are either their avowed enemies, or belong to a strange and rival village. Human skulls are hung up in all their houses as so many precious relics and emblems of bravery. The more heads a man has, the richer and greater he is esteemed. New heads are held in higher estimation than old ones. We saw some only two years old. The hair and scalp are taken off, and the skull bone is polished and ornamented, with figures, made by an edged tool. There is generally a bunch of rattan leaves on each side of the head. They are held as so many charms to procure the blessings and ward off evils. Hence, they will not part with them. At one of the villages we asked for one, but the prompt reply was, "no, cannot," and the only reason assigned was that sickness would be the inevitable consequence.

When Thomson first arrived among the Dyaks, he reported that he seldom entered a house that did not display a collection of skulls. It should be noted, however, that during the time that the missionaries labored at Karangan, the Dyaks of that area seemed to be giving up headhunting, although others in adjoining regions still persisted in the custom.

Despite several practices among the Dyaks that seemed repugnant to the missionaries, the latter found a great deal to admire among the people they had come to convert. Following the first visit to their villages, Thomson and Youngblood reported them to be "mild, inoffensive, and docile in their disposition. In our opinion there would be no more danger from them, in ordinary times, than from the most civilized people in the world." Notwithstanding the practice of headhunting, the missionaries never changed their views that the Dyaks with whom they associated were a peace-loving people.

The missionaries also admired the Dyaks because of the virtual absence of thievery in their society. Despite their chronic poverty and the difficulty the missionaries would have in hiding even small items from searching eyes, they never once had an article of any consequence stolen. It is also interesting to note in this respect that although the missionaries had plenty of garden produce, especially fruit, the Dyaks always asked for such products instead of pilfering them. As reported by Steele, this was true "even with hunger gnawing at their vitals, and with full knowledge that the asking [was] but a form."

These, then were the kind of people that a small band of missionaries had come to serve in the wilds of Borneo in 1842. Seldom have missionaries been called to labor under more primitive and trying circumstances. As will be explained in the following chapter, despite well-nigh overwhelming obstacles and several personal tragedies and their own steadily deteriorating health, the faith of the missionaries in a providential God never wavered. Indeed, misfortunes seemed to make them more determined than ever to "save the perishing Dyaks."

7
The Mission at Karangan

In finally choosing a site for their Dyak mission, the missionaries selected Karangan, a village located a few miles south of Landak. Its distance from Pontianak and the coast was about eighty miles in a straight line but about one hundred forty miles by the usual thoroughfare—the Kapuas and Landak rivers. The ordinary time required for ascending the rivers to Karangan was about five to eight days in rowboats or canoes and from eight to twenty days in larger boats that carried supplies and were poled from shore. The journey could last much longer, though, if the water level or the strength of the current was unfavorable. Return trips downstream could, of course, be completed in a shorter time.

After completing their exploratory tour in the late spring of 1842, Thompson and Youngblood had to delay their return to the Dyaks for a brief period because of some minor hostilities in the interior. But on September 13, 1842, the two men set out to finalize their plans and to call on the penambahan (the local Malay potentate) to obtain permission for building the necessary mission houses. They were well received by the Malay official and succeeded in obtaining authorization to go ahead with their plans. He even directed one of his men to accompany the missionaries to Karangan to inform the Dyaks that the necessary permission had been given and that they should assist in constructing the mission houses. Most of the Dyaks seemed genuinely pleased that the missionaries were going to reside among them, but a few, including one of the headmen, were suspicious and would not cooperate until one of their number had first gone to Landak and personally checked out the matter with the penambahan.

The exact site selected for building the mission at Karangan was in a large patch of almost impenetrable jungle about a ten minute walk from the village. The Dyaks were surprised at the choice, but the missionaries favored it because it was on a piece of high ground and only a few steps from the river. With the assistance of the Dyaks, who were pleased to receive the wages of about ten cents per diem but were not particularly fond of the manual labor, the missionaries began clearing the site and gathering construction materials. A small cabin about twelve feet square was erected as a temporary residence for the missionaries while the main buildings were

being constructed. Since it took only two days to complete, it obviously was makeshift at best. Youngblood returned to Pontianak in late September, but Thomson lived in these temporary quarters with its dirt floor for nearly three months.

Work on the main buildings proceeded slowly, although they were of simple construction. The framing consisted of bamboos and small poles and saplings, while the walls and roofs were covered with broad leaves and slabs of bark. Several problems were encountered during the construction process. To begin with, it took three days of discussion among the Dyak laborers to decide whether to work by the day or contract the entire project at a fixed cost. In the end, the Dyaks decided to sell the large timbers "ready for use" for a specific price and leave it to each individual Dyak to decide for himself how he would be paid for other work. Such procedures prompted Thomson to write in his journal: "Whatever may be the advantages of this patriarchal system, it certainly has this disadvantage, at least as carried out among Dyaks, that it is apt to make business move on very slowly. Every trifle must undergo, not exactly the severest scrutiny, but the most ample discussion."

In terms of expense, the two mission houses cost about two hundred fifty dollars each. Payment to the Dyaks was in the form of money and food, with the latter comprising mainly rice and salt. A crisis of sorts was reached in early October when Thomson's money and food supply ran out, and the Dyaks refused to work until they had received their promised allowance. The shortage occurred because a group of Dyaks who had accompanied Youngblood back to Pontianak in late September were a week late in returning to Karangan with supplies.

On October 28, Thomson himself left Karangan for a brief visit to Pontianak. Although he had instructed the Dyaks to continue work on the mission houses during his absence, when he returned about a month later on November 23, he discovered that little had been done while he was away. Thomson was accompanied on his return by Youngblood who had been occupied during the previous weeks with closing the Malay school at Pontianak.

Youngblood and Thomson were naturally anxious to complete the mission houses as soon as possible so that they could bring their families to Karangan. They therefore contributed much of their own time to their construction, although they always set aside a part of each day for preaching to the Dyaks and for language study. It is interesting to note that in supervising the construction of the mission houses, Thomson, who dearly loved nature, took special care not to disturb the natural surroundings more than was necessary. For example, when the Dyaks proposed demolishing several large anthills, each from three to five feet high, near his cabin, he discouraged it. As reported in his journal for September 29, 1842: "It struck me I could use them in ornamenting the place. I like to preserve every production of nature as nearly as possible in the situation in which I find it."

By mid-December, Thomson's house was sufficiently completed so that the two men could return to Pontianak and make plans for moving the Thomson family to their new location, although at this time only one room had been enclosed. No doubt a desire to spend Christmas with their families also figured in the decision to

return to Pontianak at this time. The Thomson family left for their new home on January 10, 1843, arriving there on the 19th. One month later, on February 18, the missionary wrote De Witt that his house was "still unfinished, though in such a state that we can live in it in comfort, and hope in the course of another month to welcome Brother Youngblood and family beneath our roof, who will sojourn with us while his house, which is also raised and under cover, is in process of completion." The Youngblood family finally arrived at Karangan on March 24.

In all, about twenty acres of jungle growth were cleared for the mission compound, which had the appearance of an equilateral triangle with the base line running along the river's edge. The three missionary buildings were each located near one of the angles of the clearing. The Thomson family occupied the dwelling in the left corner along the river's edge, while the Youngblood's lived in the house in the right corner. The Reverend Steele, who arrived in late 1843 and was unmarried, shared living quarters with the Thomsons. The small building that had been built to serve as a temporary dwelling for Thomson while his main house was under construction was located at the apex of the triangle. It later was enlarged, provided with a plank flooring, and divided into two equal sections. One section, consisting of two very small rooms and a hall, accommodated a friend of Mrs. Thomson who frequently came to Karangan and occasional visitors from Pontianak. Sunday services were held in the other half, which was furnished with benches and a table and chair.

The family dwellings were constructed on pillars or stilts so that the houses were from three to five feet above the ground. Each house was about thirty-five by fifty-five feet in size, excluding the covered verandah that was several feet in width and ran entirely around the house. The main part of the dwelling had a steeply pitched roof for shedding the rain and at the same time provided an attic for storage purposes. The living area consisted of four rooms with a large hall down the center that was large enough for small religious gatherings. One of the rooms served as a combination kitchen and dining room, but most of the cooking was done in a small building to the rear. Some of the furnishings were brought from the United States but most of them were made locally. Steele, for example, mentions having two very comfortable arm chairs made by a Chinaman for about $1.50 each.

The mission clearing included an immense garden and orchard which had been carefully laid out by Thomson. In it were found a variety of trees and plants, including sugar palm, coconut, betel nut, plantain (a type of banana plant), breadfruit, clove, and nutmeg, as well as different kinds of vegetables and flowers, many of which bloomed all year long. Most of the plants were grouped together according to type, with the various groups separated from one another by paths which meandered around the garden to form various patterns. A person could walk more than a mile along these paths without ever doubling his or her tracks. Pineapple plants were cultivated on the sides of the paths so as to utilize the thorny leaves as protective fences against rodents and other animals. Because of the rapid manner in which the pineapples multiplied, they eventually numbered several thousand. Also located within the garden confines was a small cemetery known as "Burial Knoll," where

two of Thomson's children were buried. On another knoll at about midpoint along the base line and near the river's edge, the missionaries frequently displayed a flag, which spot was appropriately called "Flagstaff Hill."

The missionaries had no knowledge of the Dyak language when they first began working in their new field, so they spoke in Malay. This met with some success as there usually were a few Dyaks who understood Malay and because many of the words in the two languages were similar—which, it should be noted, illustrates once again the benefit that the missionaries derived from their language training at Batavia. Even after becoming somewhat acquainted with Dyak, a knowledge of Malay proved beneficial at times in overcoming the difficulty of dealing with the numerous dialects existing among the Dyaks, frequently even within a small area. This problem and how it was sometimes solved is explained in Youngblood's journal entry for October 17, 1843, describing his visit to the village of Sangku:

> In the evening, when the people had come in from their ladangs and assembled around, I read a portion of scripture translated into the Dyak language spoken at Karangan, but it was soon evident that but few words only were understood, while at Palni, through which I had passed, and not more than five miles distant, it was understood by all. I then laid aside my Dyak, and read from a Malay translation, which all understood to a greater or less degree, and addressed them for about an hour and a half, and during which time the greater part seemed to listen with more than usual attention.

The degree to which Malay was understood varied greatly, however, from village to village, and the missionaries quickly realized they would have to learn Dyak and its dialects if they expected to carry on a comprehensive missionary program. Unfortunately, Dyak, unlike Malay, was still largely an unwritten language at the time the missionaries set foot on Borneo. As a consequence, no Dyak dictionaries or grammars were available, and no translations of scripture or religious tracts had yet been made. The problems facing the missionaries on this matter were further compounded by the peculiar intonations and accents of many Dyak words, which made pronunciation extremely difficult for English-speaking people. As explained by Thomson, the language had "all the ruggedness of the most unpolished tongue. To the delicate soul of harmony, it would seem to have been built up of some of the roughest stones from the ruins of Babel."

Beginning with their first visit, the missionaries therefore started taking careful notes on the language. The following entries in Thomson's journal, extending over about a ten day period of the initial tour made in the spring of 1842, illustrate the procedure that was followed:

> April 11 at Sangku: In the course of the afternoon I endeavored to collect a small specimen of their language."

> April 15 at Daid: "Took a sample of their dialect and found a very large proportion of words presicely (*sic*) the same as those used at Targku."
>
> April 18 at a small village at the mouth of the Ryan river: "Though weary [of travel]…we took a sample of their language, which was found almost word for word to agree with what had previously been obtained from others."
>
> April 22 at Tinggalong: "Took a sample of their language, which was said to be altogether peculiar. It was indeed considerably different from all I had yet seen, although many words were the same. There was still a great mixture with Malay."

The practice of note-taking was continued by the missionaries after they established themselves at Karangan, and a classification of words was started. As early as October 2, 1842, for example, Thomson reported having gathered about three hundred words from the Dyak language. Concerning these, he stated, "Upon examination…one-fourth of them are pure Malay, with a very slight difference, if any, in pronunciation." Initially, of course, when addressing the Dyaks in their own language, the missionaries had to use simple words and frequently had to question their listeners on what was being said in order to determine if they understood the missionaries' remarks. By recording the answers of the Dyaks, a further knowledge of the language was gradually built up. Once the missionaries acquired sufficient understanding of the language, they began translating parts of the Scripture and other writings into Dyak. Thus, under date of February 4, 1844, Thomson stated: "This afternoon I have completed the translation of Brown's Catechism. It will undoubtedly be highly useful as a medium of instruction, as it is generally quite intelligible to all."

From their first visits among the Dyaks, the missionaries became absorbed in their primary task of explaining the gospel message. That they lost no time in getting to the purpose of their being in Borneo is shown in some of the journal entries made by Thomson during his first tour among them. The entry for April 11, 1842 describing the visit to Sangku is typical:

> After thus drawing [the Dyaks] into some degree of familiarity, and awakening their minds to a deeper interest in the object of our visit, I tried to tell them in Malay, as simply as I could, the nature of our work and the design we contemplated. They listened with the utmost attention and apparent intelligence to the account of our fallen state and the plan of mercy revealed in the Gospel. In the evening, Mr. Youngblood read and expounded a portion of Scripture, concluding with prayer.

To cite another example of what sometimes transpired during these early contacts there is Thomson's account of an experience at Samandang that followed his being offered a small bowl of *arrack* (an intoxicating drink) as a special treat. This

offer, which was politely refused, opened the way for Thomson to discuss the subject of temperance, which in turn led him to introduce other subjects. As reported in his journal for May 26, 1842:

> They seemed very ready to listen, and I spent some considerable time in expatiating upon the evil of all intoxicating drinks. Nor did they take the least offense at what was said, though they evidently understood it; but, on the contrary, admitted the force of the arguments, and made such just remarks on the subject as to show that they are not insensible to its importance. The consideration of temperance made an easy transition to that of righteousness and judgment, the value of the soul, and the interests of eternity. Finally the gospel, as the great scheme of salvation to dying man, was gradually introduced, opened, and enforced.

Specifically, how did the Dyaks react when a missionary arrived in one of their communities? In one of his many writings, Thomson took his readers on an imaginary visit to a typical Dyak village. The account is interesting because it not only gives a good insight into the day to day experiences of the Borneo missionaries but also presents a description of village life among the Dyaks.

> Behold the opening scene. Mutual greetings exchanged (for it is seldom indeed that the Dyak will not welcome you cordially to his spacious house and humble fare). If you look around, here, perhaps, are a number treading *padi* [i.e., unhulled rice], there you will see others whetting their edge tools, or their weapons; before this door is a person braiding a basket, before that, another weaving mats; on this side is a man hewing out paddles, on that, a matron pounding rice; here comes a child toddling on its feet; yonder goes a parent carrying an infant on his back; on one spot is a party engaged in lively chat, on another, a company of senators, debating matters of grave and serious import.

Thomson then went on to discuss how the villagers, engaged as described above, reacted to the arrival of the missionary.

> Can this motley mass be brought to order, this noise and confusion be reduced to quiet? Strange to say, a word will sometimes do it, and a moment after your appearance among them may find you sitting or standing, reading, expounding, or preaching to a whole congregation of eager listeners! The reverse, it is true may be witnessed. Some, however, will generally attend, either for a moment, or an hour, and our object is not to tarry, but to teach….For the present we must pursue our onward way. Such a spectacle may be presented once, or twice, or thrice, or four

> or five times in the course of a single day. Details may differ. Still this may be taken for a general view.

When the missionary was on a tour of several villages and was unable to return to his home by nightfall, his quarters for the night were usually simple—sometimes a tent but often merely a mattress placed on a mat over which a mosquito netting was draped for protection against the myriads of insects. Continuing his imaginary visit to a Dyak village, Thomson went on to describe a typical evening scene.

> When the sun has fairly set, unless a brilliant moon keeps up the illusion of day, night at once comes down upon the face of nature. The spacious [court area] …is now cleared of most of the rubbish collected through the day, and probably free from the noise and hum of busy bustling life. In place of such objects and employments, is revealed—as one after another, the tiny oil-tapers, or the huge resinous candles, or the little blazing fires, diffuse their welcome light—here, a solitary individual, pursuing silently some noiseless occupation of twisting cord or shaving ratan withes, or mending tattered garments; there, a couple engaged together in some similar undertaking, which requires their united efforts; yonder, a little knot of talkers, narrating the events of the day, or devising schemes for the employment of the morrow; in that corner, a man of years, relating the strange legends of another age, and by mysterious occurrences and facts, as absurd as false, accounting for the customs and superstitions of the present generation;…But strangest among them all, sits the feeble missionary, alone, and yet not alone, in the high endeavor, the desperate purpose, to stem this mighty torrent of worldliness and vanity, of dreary superstition and soul-corroding iniquity! His little, unostentatious taper, too, is seen to shoot up its faint and flickering light. The call for a solemn assembly is given perchance aloud, or perchance, if circumstances seem to render that improper or useless, he begins his humble work in a more modest, unobtrusive way. The leaves of the Tree of Life, however, are unfolded, and all who despise not utterly the invitation, enjoy at least one blest opportunity to hear the message of Heaven's mercy to guilty, dying man.

The sermons of the missionaries were delivered as simply as possible and were accompanied by scripture reading and prayer and sometimes also by the singing of a short hymn or psalm. In their preaching, frequent references were made to incidents in Biblical history. Certain stories and doctrines had greater appeal than others. Among those that held the greatest attraction were the accounts of the Creation and the Flood and the doctrine that all men, Dyak and Malay alike, were equal before God.

During their visits to the villages, the missionaries also frequently broached the subject of education. When genuine interest was shown, they would then devote a

brief period to teaching a few rudiments of the alphabet to young and old alike. If the inclination to learn remained sincere, the missionaries would pursue this aspect of their visit a while longer, with a promise to continue it during their next visit. Requests for them to stay several days instead of a few hours and even to locate permanently in their villages were not uncommon.

On Sundays, when not visiting neighboring villages, the missionaries maintained regular sabbath services at Karangan in Dyak at nine o'clock and in Malay at three o'clock, as well as an English service for themselves and their families at eleven o'clock. For the sake of those in the employ of the mission, and anyone else who wished to attend, daily family-type worship in Dyak was also held at Karangan. The Sunday services for the Dyaks and Malays were held in the mission "church," while those in English and the daily services were generally conducted in the home of one of the missionaries. In commenting on the daily services, Thomson and Steele wrote in 1845:

> In addition to the reading and expounding of scripture, we have carefully instructed them in that most simple and yet comprehensive system of divine truth contained in Brown's Catechism; so that several have not only had the opportunity to learn, but have actually been in a manner necessitated to retain and ponder, to revolve and, we may say in a sense, digest all the great and leading principles of our holy religion.

8
Later Developments Among the Chinese

While these developments were going on at Karangan, Pohlman and Doty kept themselves busy at Pontianak with their labors among the Chinese. This work soon became quite routine, and included preaching at the mission compound on Sundays, visiting the people in the streets and in their homes on other days, distributing religious literature, superintending the schools, and, of course, striving to improve their knowledge of the Chinese language. From time to time, too, the Pontianak missionaries made extended journeys to other Chinese settlements.

It will be recalled that when the Chinese mission was first established at Pontianak in late 1839, the missionaries took note of possible opportunities for reaching other Chinese communities in the area with the gospel message. This is clearly seen in a letter of February 28, 1840 from Nevius and Youngblood to the secretary of the denominational Board of Foreign Missions:

> Again, we indulge a hope that the benefit of a Chinese station here [at Pontianak] might extend beyond the two thousand souls of this immediate region—for one important feature in the character of this place as a mission station for the Chinese, seems to us to arise from its present position, and its connection with other places. With the six or eight hundred Chinese on the Kapwas River, and the same number on the Landak, and the eight or ten thousand of Mandoor and Mempawa—the former of which is situated on a branch of the Landak, two days from Pontianak, and the latter on the seacoast, twelve or fifteen miles north of the mouth of the Pontianak—there is communication by water, and intercourse by native boats [are] quite frequent. In fact the natural and easiest way of approach to these places is through Pontianak.

Of the several visits made to neighboring Chinese communities, the one made by Pohlman in early 1843 was one of the most interesting. Pohlman was able to make a

tour at this time because of his school being closed for two weeks due to the Chinese New Year. He was accompanied by Youngblood who also had some free time while waiting at Pontianak for word from Thomson that the missionary quarters at Karangan were sufficiently completed to enable him to bring his family there. The two men left on January 28, 1843 aboard a small coastal trading boat. Later, they pursued their journey by whatever mode of transportation seemed most feasible—canoe, sailboat, or by foot.

During their travels, the missionaries visited a number of communities, some of which were small villages while others had several thousand inhabitants. Most of them were Chinese, but there were Malays as well and these were preached to by Youngblood. The visit to the village of Penyaraman, as recorded in Pohlman's journal under date of January 30, is typical of what transpired:

> At the specified time 40 or 50 Chinese came together, and seemed to take no small interest in the exercises, which I concluded to conduct in the regular way. I began by telling them we had met for the worship of the true God and Jesus Christ, whom God had sent—and that worship consisted in singing his praise, calling on his name, and proclaiming his Gospel. I asked them if they wished me to go on with such exercises. The reply was, "gae, gae, we want it, we want it." They then agreed to be quiet. The singing gratified them much. Before engaging in prayer, I explained its nature, told them I was unable to speak unless God aided, and they would not hear, unless God gave them a hearing ear. As I engaged in the exercise almost profound silence prevailed. In explaining to them who Jesus was, and the nature of saving faith in him, they all listened attentively, and thanked me sincerely for coming so far over the wide ocean to tell them of Jesus and the way to heaven. We spent a long season after the meeting in conversation, they asking and I replying to their questions.

Occasionally, on the tour, the preaching took place in private homes but usually it occurred in the open air. Sometimes the accommodations were unusual. In one instance, for example, Pohlman mounted a gambling table so that he could be heard better in exhorting the people and could more easily distribute religious literature. Frequently, the missionaries addressed their listeners from the local distillery, or "Whiskey Porch," as the Chinese called it. This practice had some logic to it because of the number of people who congregated there, including travelers. As explained by Pohlman, the business of distilling among the Chinese was in the hands of the controller, and the distillery served as a public house where the travelers could stop and eat at public expense.

Pohlman and Youngblood faced their greatest challenge at Montrado where, if one includes the "suburbs," about 7,500 Chinese resided. Here the two men were virtually besieged by the Chinese day and night. Pohlman preached several times

daily to audiences of from thirty to two hundred in size, and the two men distributed more than 1,400 religious tracts. Most everyone seemed to approve their presence and willingly listened to their remarks. Several promised to send their children to the mission school at Pontianak and not a few invitations were received asking the missionaries to settle at Montrado permanently. The receptive attitude of the Chinese toward the missionaries is seen in the flattering epithets that were freely used in addressing Pohlman, who was already known to some of the Chinese because of his earlier visits or because of their having heard him at Pontianak. Titles by which Pohlman was addressed included: "moral sage," "warner of the age," "good, perfect-hearted reformer," "exhorter of the world," and "venerable prince."

Many Chinese on Borneo, like those in their homeland, were addicted to opium, a problem that the missionaries worked hard to combat. On this tour, as on other occasions, they attacked it in their preaching, and distributed tracts pointing out the evils associated with the undue use of the drug. They also dispensed a kind of anti-opium medicine to any Chinese who seriously desired to break the opium habit. This method is clearly explained in Pohlman's journal describing the events of February 6 and 7 at Montrado:

> Having a quantity of opium medicine, we were run down by applications night and day till it was all gone. This medicine is designed merely to aid those who in sincerity desire to break off the use of the intoxicating drug. It is simply tartar emetic and ipecac compounded with the opium a person uses daily, in about equal proportions. It is administered in the form of pills. The first dose must be large enough to produce a free vomit. The succeeding ones are intended to excite such a nausea that the opium-smoker will loathe the smell, and even the sight of his once favorite stimulant. Many radical cures have been effected, while others have gone back, verifying the proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." One man came and thanked me sincerely for doses I had given him at Pontianak, and which had enabled him to effect a thorough reform…We gave the medicine to none but those who promised to remain firm and not yield to temptation, however strong and seductive.

The missionaries returned to Pontianak on February 13, having spent about two weeks visiting the settlements to the north and northwest. Following their return, Pohlman resumed his regular routine of assisting Doty and ministering to the local Chinese, while Youngblood made final preparations for joining Thomson in his work among the Dyaks. He finally left with his family on the 18th of March, arriving at Karangan on the 24th.

Not long after the completion of the tour described above, the missionaries were faced with a major decision regarding the Chinese branch of their labors, namely, whether to retain Pohlman and Doty at Pontianak or have them leave for a new field

in China itself. Christian missionaries had long been prohibited from entering that country, except for some limited activity at Canton. After China's defeat by England, however, after the First Opium War (1839-1842), this changed as missionaries were allowed to enter four more ports, Amoy, Ningpo, Foochow, and Shanghai, in addition to Canton.

The effect that the Anglo-Chinese War might have on the future of Christian missions in China became a subject of discussion in Reformed Church circles even before hostilities ceased. Particularly interesting in this respect is a communication of October 1840 from the Reverend Pohlman to the Classis of Albany. At the time it was written, he was still fulfilling his year's residency requirement at Batavia. In his letter, Pohlman pointed out that "China Proper" might soon be opened to missions, no matter which side was victorious in the fighting, and he wondered how the Church would react to the opportunity.

> Are we ready for such an event? Is the Church prepared? Will she come up with alacrity to the help of the Lord against the mighty hosts of this extensive empire?
>
> Dear Brethren, what part will the Classis of Albany bear in the redemption of China? Here is an object which demands your noblest efforts, and if you put forth exertions commensurate with the magnitude of the object, what must we not expect? Here we behold a vast domain, stretching from East to West, more than 3000 miles, and from North to South upwards of 2000 miles. In it are multitudes—multitudes of immortal beings; in China itself 360 millions, and in all her dependencies enough more to swell the number to 400 millions. Faith anticipates the day when these myriads shall all become the willing subjects of victorious grace. Oh what a prize! What a jewel in the Redeemer's crown!

When the defeat of China finally came in 1842 and permission was given for missionaries to locate there in certain specified places, the opportunities for establishing Reformed missions in that country were stressed anew. Among the various ideas discussed was that consideration be given to transferring Pohlman and Doty, because of their knowledge of Chinese, from Borneo to China. A strong proponent of this view was the Reverend David Abeel who, as described earlier, had arrived at Canton in 1830 and a short time later had encouraged the founding of a Reformed mission in the Dutch East Indies, a recommendation that ultimately led to founding the Borneo mission. A visit by Abeel to Borneo in the autumn of 1841, while on his second tour of duty in the Far East, left him disappointed regarding the future of the mission there. This experience, together with his great enthusiasm for the China field, prompted him to urge drastic changes in the Borneo mission. These were outlined in a letter of October 31, 1842 written from China to the Reverend De Witt:

> I have written to you plainly, and without prejudice, respecting the comparative claims and prospects of Borneo and China as missionary

> fields. Having visited the former,…I ought to possess the best grounds of judgment. Recent events in divine providence present China to the Church of Christ in a new aspect. No flaming sword now guards the approach to this Empire.

After describing the many opportunities that had just opened up for establishing "the Redeemer's kingdom" in China itself and noting the shortage of competent missionaries that country would likely face for many years, Abeel further informed De Witt:

> My dear brother, I must speak candidly when so much is depending. Borneo is the very antipodes of all this. I have never visited a field so barren, so uninviting. I do not think you could meet a missionary in this part of the world who would not advise you to transfer your Chinese missionaries, Doty and Pohlman, immediately to some of the populous and vacant cities [in China]. To spend their lives [at Pontianak] in teaching the few children in their schools, and in preaching to the small congregations they can gather…[is foolish] when they could get more children than they could teach, and could spend all their strength in preaching and conversation.

Abeel did not advocate the closing of the Borneo mission entirely, In his view, those who had given their time to the Malay and Dyak languages ought to remain there and their numbers should be increased. Those who studied Chinese, however, and had become proficient in it ought to be sent where they can do the most good and reach the largest number of people. To do otherwise, according to Abeel, was "a great misapplication of the talents which God has committed to us."

Several Reformed Church leaders in America shared Abeel's views, declaring that the problems in Borneo were perhaps an indication from Providence that the mission should be abandoned in favor of China. The Prudential Committee of the American Board also looked with favor upon transferring at least some of the Borneo missionaries. It is therefore not surprising that at its June meeting in 1843, General Synod approved the transfer of Pohlman and Doty from Borneo to China "under the conviction that they will enjoy a more extended field of usefulness there than in their present location." General Synod added, however, that the final decision on the matter should be left to the missionaries themselves.

The China question came up for serious discussion among the Borneo missionaries during a meeting held at Karangan in mid-December 1843. Those present included Thomson, Youngblood, Pohlman, and Steele. The latter, it will be recalled, had just completed his "internship" at Batavia and had come to assist Thomson and Youngblood in their work among the Dyaks. Doty had intended to join the group but was prevented from doing so because of some unexpected developments at Pontianak. The missionaries met together for several days discussing common problems and plans for the future, including the China question. With reference to the

latter, Pohlman proposed that he and Doty, with their families, proceed to China as soon as possible. After considerable discussion and prayer on the matter, it was decided that for the present, the needs of the Karangan mission required someone to stay at Pontianak. Therefore, only one of the men should leave for China at this time. Meanwhile, strong entreaties should be sent to America asking for additional missionaries for Borneo.

The view that someone should stay at Pontianak requires a brief explanation because it stemmed from several considerations. Nearly all supplies for Karangan, for example, including much of the rice, had to come via that place. Pontianak was also important for its link with Singapore as most missionary correspondence with the outside world was transmitted through that port, and supplies not available in Borneo were usually shipped from there. Important money matters involving the missionaries also made it necessary to have a trusted person at Pontianak. Paper money received from America by the missionaries had to be exchanged at Singapore for silver, which then was kept in a safe place at Pontianak and later exchanged for copper as the occasion demanded. This exchange was necessary because copper was the medium of exchange at Karangan.

Doty was the man selected to go to China first, perhaps because of his having been at Borneo longer than Pohlman. On February 10, 1844, he and his family journeyed to Karangan to pay their respects to the missionaries there prior to departing for China. In early March, however, Doty was back at Karangan, this time accompanied by Pohlman. The two men had come to ask that the China question be reopened for further discussion. During these talks, Thomson, who in the past had opposed allowing even one of the Pontianak missionaries to leave for China, completely reversed himself and declared it should be left to Doty and Pohlman themselves to make the decision. Although Youngblood and Steele would have preferred adhering to the original decision, Thomson's view came to be favored by the majority. The next day being Sunday, the five missionaries, in consideration of their upcoming separation and the solemnity of the occasion, celebrated Holy Communion together. The pensiveness of the scene was added to by the death in the afternoon of Thomson's youngest daughter. The funeral took place on the following day, after which Doty and Pohlman bade their farewells. Soon after their return to Pontianak, the Chinese mission was closed. On April 8, 1844, the two men and their families left for China, thereby ending one of the chapters of the Borneo mission.

Although the Chinese branch of the Borneo mission had been closed, the missionaries who left for China did not look upon their work at Pontianak as having been in vain. Indeed, they remained optimistic about its future. Shortly after arriving at Amoy in mid-1844, Pohlman wrote as follows to the First Reformed Church of Albany, New York:

> To human view it seems a dark providence which so signally pointed out Borneo as our field of labor—which took us there in safety, and continued us in labor nearly three years, without seeing a single soul

savingly united to Christ. But who will dare say our labor has been in vain? Who can for a moment doubt the power of God to convert long after we are in the grave? The seed sown even on the barren soil of Borneo, shall yet spring up. God's word preached, taught, distributed, shall not return unto him void. It shall accomplish the purpose whereto he has sent it.

9
Problems at Karangan

The closing of the mission at Pontianak did not spell the end of the Borneo project. The Karangan mission still remained and its missionaries were determined not to abandon it. Their reports at this time indicate general satisfaction with the results of their preaching and confidence that it would be only a matter of time before they will be welcoming their first convert into the church. As evidence of progress in their labors, the missionaries pointed to such matters as the receptions accorded them whenever they entered a Dyak village, the willingness of the natives to listen to the gospel message, and the interest that was sometimes shown in establishing a mission school.

As a case point, when Thomson made a tour of several Dyak villages between November 13 and 17, 1843, he reported being well-received everywhere by both Dyaks and Malays. Typical of the optimism being expressed at this stage of the mission's history is the entry in Thomson's journal for November 15 regarding his visit to Papong:

> They assembled, according to my request, to hear the word; and their seriousness, attention, and evident apprehension of what was said, were most gratifying. They declared that they had never heard of these things before, and they seemed to feel as if new light had broken in upon their minds. They were unmeasured in their commendation of the truths delivered, and compared them with the stories which the Malays tell them on the same subjects, greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. With peculiar emphasis it was observed and acknowledged that neither from their ancestors, from their *bitians* (sacerdotal physicians), nor from the Malays, had they ever received any information of this kind. One of them inquired what would be the consequence if those who heard the message of mercy did not believe. This I made known, as explicitly as possible, in such a way as I thought best calculated to magnify the goodness of God, endeavoring by plain and familiar illustrations, to bring

> the subject down to their comprehension. From all that transpired, I am quite sure that they understood me, and I have reason to think that they, in a measure, appreciated the truth. I never before felt such substantial ground of encouragement in our labors.

Descriptions of other tours and of the regular Sunday worship services at Karangan generally contained similar optimistic accounts. For example, following a visit to several villages in early April 1844, Thomson reported results comparable to those achieved during the tour of the previous November. Likewise, in his journal entry for Sunday, March 31, 1844, he estimated that about forty men, women, and children had congregated that day in the "mission hall" at Karangan to hear him preach, the largest assembly yet encountered there.

The missionaries were also encouraged by Mrs. Thomson's success in finally opening a mission school at Karangan in March 1844. Instructions began with two sets of students—one of about a dozen boys ranging in age from eight to sixteen, and another of girls of the same age level. Unfortunately, her death on December 5, 1844 virtually caused a suspension of classes, at least on a regular basis.

Although the early reports from Karangan radiated considerable optimism about the future, the missionaries nevertheless acknowledged the existence of several problems. From the beginning, they were disappointed with the sparseness of the population and the fact that the Dyaks lived in scattered villages rather than being concentrated in just a few places. Already when the mission was being established, Thomson gave some indication of this when he wrote in October 1842:

> To afford you a better idea of the place in which we are locating, I remark: A circle drawn, with this place [i.e., Karangan] for a centre and a day's journey for a radius, would embrace in its circumference the villages of Sangku, Singgalong, Pantu, Senkunang, Kasih, Bolong, Angan, Munyak and Pelai, containing at least 300 lawangs or individual houses, and about 2,000 inhabitants. Within this circle and at a distance of from half an hour to 5 or 6 hours' walk are the villages of Obah, Tembawang, Saretok, Kayuara, Jalimpau, Tobang and Papong, containing about 160 lawangs, with a population of perhaps 1,000 or more.

The total population was thus about 3,000 souls within a day's journey of the mission station, and they were scattered among more than fifteen villages. This meant that each village had an average of only about 200 inhabitants. To reach all the villages, the missionaries would have to labor in an itinerant manner, traveling from place to place. This was unfortunate for several reasons. It would mean that they could visit only a small number of Dyaks at a time, and the occasions of the visits would have to be spaced several days apart. It also meant that difficulties would be encountered in maintaining a regularly staffed school, as the missionaries would be away "in the bush" much of the time. The missionaries acknowledged that their

wives could be of help in this matter and that they were willing to assist, but their aid would be limited because they had their own households to manage, including the care and instructions of their own children.

The problems associated with the sparseness of the population and the need to look after so many scattered villages were aggravated by the poor travel conditions existing in Borneo. As has been noted, Thomson's journals often presented an idyllic picture of Borneo through his graphic descriptions of hills and valley, of dense jungles and open fields, and of mountain torrents and slow-moving rivulets—descriptions that were often interspersed with sketches about such matters as the beauty of butterflies, the antics of monkeys (which Thomson calls "Lilliputian gentlemen"), and the soft melodies of the birds. In reality, though, travel in the interior was far from fanciful and romantic. No time was really perfect for journeying from village to village: night travel was virtually impossible because of fear of getting lost, while walking during the early morning hours would often leave one dripping wet from heavy dew. Travel later in the day could be equally unbearable because of drenching rains and the melting hot sun. It is no wonder that the missionaries often wore out two or three umbrellas in a single year! Even in daytime, until the missionaries became acquainted with the countryside, it was not uncommon to get lost because of poorly marked trails. On journeying into new territory, the guides themselves sometimes lost their way. Adding to the problems of travel was the narrowness of the paths, which could mean that if a missionary were not careful he could become badly scratched or have his clothing torn by briars. In a few instances, villages could be reached only by wading through waist-high marshes. Travel by boat on the smaller streams was equally difficult because of rapids as well as fallen trees and floating logs.

The problems facing the missionaries, which were regularly reported back home in the denominational paper, caused some patrons to look upon Borneo as an uncivilized land, and led to questions about its choice as a mission site. It was to answer these and other questions and at the same time make an appeal for reinforcements that the Karangan missionaries drafted a memorable document in early 1844. The document grew out of a three-day conference held at Karangan in mid-December 1843. It will be recalled that it was at this meeting that the China question was discussed in detail for the first time. The primary purpose of this gathering, however, was not China but to make a careful and candid appraisal of the present status and future prospects of the Karangan mission.

Before the conference disbanded, it was resolved that the missionaries who were laboring among the Dyaks, that is, Youngblood, Thomson, and Steele, should constitute themselves as a special committee to "make a full representation of their case to our patrons and the churches, with an earnest appeal for adequate assistance." The results of their efforts was the "Statement and Appeal of the Borneo Mission," more popularly known as the "Appeal." Copies of this document were sent to the Prudential Committee of the American Board and to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church. A copy was likewise sent to and published in the *Christian*

Intelligencer. It was also issued in pamphlet form of thirty-two pages and was frequently referred to during later discussions about the Borneo mission. Several copies were distributed, for example, among members of General Synod at its annual meeting in June 1848. In addition to summarizing what had been talked about at the Karangan meeting, the "Appeal" attempted to do three things: first, to answer criticism regarding the choice of Borneo as a mission; second, to demonstrate that it should not be abandoned; and third, to emphasize the great need for reinforcements.

In justifying the choice of Borneo as a mission field, the authors of the "Appeal" emphasized that the decision to locate there was not made by mortal man, but by God. As they expressed it, "The fact is, Borneo and the Dyaks were never, properly speaking, our choice. The event of our location here is eminently providential. This is an all important consideration, and deserves to be looked at with reverent attention, and with an unbiased disposition." In further justifying their presence on Borneo, the missionaries added that in carrying out the command to spread the Gospel to all people it was to be expected that some "heralds of salvation" would obviously have to labor in the less civilized regions of the world. As further explained, some of these "heralds" would have to "bury themselves in the wilderness and spend their energies in…the more self-denying employment of endeavoring to raise the most barbarous and savage tribes from the deep degradation into which they had sunk, and inspire their low and grovelling thoughts with a hope full of immortality."

The authors of the "Appeal" argued strongly that it would be a regrettable mistake to abandon the mission at this time after so much had been accomplished. Although there had as yet been no converts, the missionaries reported that whenever one of them visited a village, he usually was able to find "a little congregation already assembled or within call of [his] voice". Moreover, although various problems continued to exist, problems that would "exercise the faith and patience of every devoted laborer" for many years to come, definite progress was being made. To quote again from the "Appeal":

> The preparation we have been making, by years of observation, study and labor, is at last bearing directly upon the great object of our hearts in coming to this Eastern world. Our acquaintance with the Malay language puts us in a great measure at ease in our intercourse with that people, and will enable us to get along with tolerable satisfaction among most of those tribes whose language we do not know, nearly all of whom use Malay to some considerable extent. In the Dyak [language] we have only made a beginning, but all who are aware of the difficulties in the way of such work know that a substantial beginning is no insignificant attainment. Of their manners and customs we know a little, and what perhaps is of more importance we have got into something of a position to make constant acquisitions.

The "Appeal" also pointed out that the Dutch government was cooperating more than it had in the past, and that ways were being developed for dealing with the more obstreperous Malays.

It must be noted, however, that when the missionaries reported in the "Appeal" that they usually were able to find at every village they visited a "little congregation already assembled or within call," the size of these "congregations" varied considerably from visit to visit. Sometimes after a missionary had been well-received during several successive calls, his next visit would attract only a few listeners. The missionaries explained such developments as resulting in part from their visits being no longer as novel as they once were and therefore, as happened with the Chinese at Pontianak, their later appearances in a village did not attract as much attention as before. They also attributed such developments to objections coming from the Malay overlords concerning Dyak attendance at the missionary meetings.

Neither of these explanations, however, are completely satisfactory. They do not explain, for example, why at one Sunday service at Karangan scarcely any Dyaks would attend except for the domestics in the employ of the mission, while a month later, the Sunday services at the same place would attract one of the largest groups of listeners ever assembled. Similarly, on some occasions, a group of Dyaks would excuse themselves on the grounds they did not understand the particular dialect being spoken, but during a later visit this same group would seem to show a decided interest in the missionary's message.

What other possible reasons can be given, then, for explaining the irregular Dyak attendance at the missionary meetings? At times, the Dyaks apparently "paid court" (as they occasionally called it) to a missionary's arrival in their village purely out of self-interest, that is, they came because of temporal wants, such as a need for rice or salt, rather than a concern for their souls. They were also sometimes attracted to the missionaries because of a kind of superstitious reverence for them. For example, if the missionaries observed a sick person whom they thought they could aid with medicine, they offered to do so. This frequently resulted in all the sick and lame coming for help on their next visit, thinking that the missionaries had some magical power over all diseases and ailments. They also attended at times to inquire about future prospects for their rice crop or where they should build a new house in order to enjoy good fortune. On some occasions the missionaries were held in such awe that the Dyaks would run away in terror at their approach, while on other occasions they would gaze in wonder at them and everything they did, wanting to examine their clothing, touch their hands and feet, or sit close to them so that their bodies touched.

In looking over the many reports and letters that the missionaries sent home, there seems to be a slight change of mood among the later communications as compared to those of an earlier date. Although one cannot detect in their writings even a slight wavering of faith or any pessimism about the ultimate outcome of their work, later communications at times indicate that they no longer believed victory was as near at hand as was once supposed.

As an example of this apparent change of mood, one can cite a letter of July 15, 1845 from Thomson and Steele. After first describing all the work that the missionaries had already accomplished, including preaching, translating, and making regular tours among the Dyak villages, the two men added the following lengthy observations:

> As a result of all, however, we must acknowledge, painfully as the fact is to ourselves, and disheartening as it may seem to you, we can see no signs of moral improvements, not to say spiritual life. The valley, like that in Ezekiel's vision, is filled only with bones, and they are not merely dead, but dry, very, very dry! There is a settled and growing apathy on the subject of religion. With considerable knowledge and some apparent appreciation for the truth, there is, just now especially, the most perfect indifference imaginable…
>
> It will naturally be supposed that the ignorance of the natives is most profound. But while this is true in regard to all the ordinary kinds of information, it is preeminently and emphatically true in respect to every thing connected with the moral and spiritual world. So much do they live like the beasts that perish, so low and grovelling are their thoughts and feelings, that it is one of the most difficult things to make them realize, even when you are speaking of the soul and the interests of eternity, that you are truly referring to another, an unseen and unchanging state…
>
> In their principles there appears to be not the slightest barrier against the floodgates of iniquity. If we look at their present infidelity, its natural result is utter recklessness. If we look at their primitive superstitions, there Satan has evidently the complete mastery of them. They almost literally call evil good, and good evil, put darkness for light, and light for darkness. The sins which they dread above all to commit, are mere violations of custom in regard to things in themselves perfectly innocent.

That the missionaries by the mid-1840's appeared to be less assured about the mission's early success is also shown in a communication of early 1846 from Thomson, Youngblood, and Steele to the secretary of the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions:

> To the present time no visible success attends our labors, nor can memory name one native in whose word we could place implicit confidence; and when the thought occurs, that should the Lord now call any one of us to his award, his last look could fall upon no native disciple by his couch of death, it awakens an untold sadness, and the burdened heart goes to him with its cry, that we may not spend our strength for nought—that we may all see the beginning of better days among these degraded ones, and that when we go hence for ever in the Lord's own time, Christian Dyaks may lay our pulseless bodies in their bed of earth.

The most serious problem facing the Karangan mission was the chronic shortage of missionaries, a difficulty that was aggravated by the fact that the Dyak villages were widely scattered. It is therefore not surprising that the missionaries, in their communications to America, frequently devoted considerable attention to describing this predicament. Indeed, the document that was drawn up following the Karangan conference of December 1843 became popularly known simply as the "Appeal" because of the urgency with which it stressed the need for more laborers.

In addition to asking that three or four ordained pastors be sent out immediately, the "Appeal" requested a physician and a printer. In reference to the former, the missionaries had been asking for a physician ever since they first set foot on Borneo four years earlier; this new request merely emphasized that the need was more pressing now than before because the mission was no longer an uncertain thing. It now had a "local habitation and a name," with strong prospects of permanency. Emphasis was also placed on the fact that because Karangan was located in the interior and far away from a medical doctor, the missionaries often had to experiment with remedies for sickness about which they knew little or nothing. Having to go to Pontianak several times themselves for relief, and even to Singapore on occasion, not to mention the death of some members of the missionary families due to lack of adequate medical treatment, were also cited as reasons for a resident doctor.

Even going to Pontianak for medical attention left something to be desired as the Dutch doctor there was a military surgeon of limited competence and experience and most certainly could not be considered a family physician. What this could mean was dramatically illustrated by the experience of the Neviuses during their brief stay at Sambas, where medical services were the same as at Pontianak. When the time arrived in the spring of 1841 for the birth of another child, the Reverend Nevius thought it best to obtain the assistance of a competent midwife rather than the local Dutch army doctor who never had any experience in delivering a baby! Unfortunately, because of complications, the child was stillborn. Nevius reported that his wife too probably would have died if it had not been for his own limited knowledge of medicine and his having done some reading about childbirth beforehand.

It is thus obvious that the missionaries could readily argue why a resident physician was needed at Karangan for their own personal needs. In keeping with their own selfless principles, however, the request was made not so much for themselves but on behalf of the Dyaks. As the "Appeal" described it, "We point to their bodily maladies as well as to their spiritual diseases." Youngblood expressed a similar view when he wrote in his journal under date of October 16, 1843:

> The benefit that a self-denying skillful physician might be to this people, in administering to the relief of their bodily maladies, could hardly be believed by those who have not been among them and witnessed the various diseases to which they are subject. The moral and religious influence too, that he could exert—if he were a man of proper spirit—would be incalculable.

Youngblood was prompted to write the above following an incident at Saretok, a village near Karangan, where a young Dyak had recently suffered a serious fall and later died from the mishap. The father became somewhat angry at Youngblood and Thomson because neither of them had come to help his son. According to Youngblood, there was nothing that either of the missionaries could have done in behalf of the boy, but if a physician had been available, the reverse might have been true, with the added result of having made a favorable impression on the people.

In addition to asking for a physician, the missionaries declared that a printer was indispensable and doubly so at this time because the presses at Batavia and Singapore, where the missionaries formerly had their work done, had been closed. To again quote from the "Appeal":

> In order to carry on our operations with any degree of efficiency we must make and publish books. This people, it is well known, are without a literature not only, but without a written language. Everything is to be done in the way of forming these first elements of civilization and refinement. This will constitute a most interesting department for an intelligent and enterprising young man, as we would naturally expect our printer to be.

A printer could also serve the missionaries in other ways. By establishing himself at Pontianak, for example, he could supervise the "pecuniary and other secular business" of the mission that had to be done there. In addition, he could probably do some proselyting among that community's Malay population.

The following supplication in the closing remarks of the "Appeal" illustrates clearly the beseeching arguments used by the Borneo missionaries in their efforts to acquire more assistants:

> Consider, you who are at ease in your possessions, whether this is not a call directly to you. Does the love of Christ burn in your bosoms, and have you no pity for those who are ready to perish? Will you not come to their rescue, and do what in you lies to pluck them as brands from the burning? We appeal to your sympathy for those who are standing alone and feeble and few upon these heathen shores, and beg you to put it to your consciences in the sight of God, whether you can withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is the power of your hand to do it? Above all, we would remind you of the opportunity of glorifying God and Saviour, by promoting the interests of his kingdom and spreading the savor of his name! What earthly advantage, what personal gain can be compared with this?

Despite this eloquent plea and the efforts of the Reformed Church leaders in America to honor it, particularly by their entreaties among recent graduates of New

Brunswick Seminary, no one answered the Macedonian call. Meanwhile, one by one, the Borneo mission was steadily depleted of its staff until finally no one was left to carry on its work. The failure to obtain reinforcements prompted the following (satirical?) remark in a letter of late February 1847 from the missionaries at Karangan to the Reverend De Witt:

> This letter is written while the evening hours of your "Day of Prayer for Colleges" are passing; and though recently informed that at our own School of Prophets [i.e., New Brunswick Seminary] September last, not one [student] could be named who hoped to preach the gospel beyond his native land, we will [continue] to hope while we have life. Lord and Master, may the past day's prayers meet with Mercy's answer.

10
End of the Mission

With the departure of Doty and Pohlman for China on April 8, 1844, only three ordained missionaries were left in Borneo: Thomson, Youngblood, and Steele. Also present were the wives of Thomson and Youngblood. A few weeks before Doty and Pohlman departed, the Youngbloods, including their two children, left Karangan to seek medical attention at Pontianak for Mrs. Youngblood. Her recovery was slow, and for a time it appeared that she might not live. Because of her poor health and "for the purpose of taking care of Mission property, attending to…pecuniary matters, and sending necessary supplies to the interior" it was decided that Youngblood should remain at Pontianak. While there, he was also expected to minister to any Dyaks residing in the area.

In late 1844, the Karangan mission was further reduced in number by the death of Mrs. Thomson. She had become ill in late November and when her condition worsened she was rushed to Pontianak for medical attention. Unfortunately, the three-day journey proved too much for her weakened condition; she died there on December 5, just a few hours after her arrival. Mrs. Thomson's death was a particularly serious blow for the mission because of her interest in education, an endeavor in which Dyak parents had shown only limited interest in the past. They kept a careful eye on their children when they were in the presence of the missionaries and could see little value in even having them learn the alphabet. The slow progress made in establishing a school was especially disappointing to the missionary wives because, as explained in the "Appeal", it prevented "the female mothers of the Mission from occupying a sphere of effort to which they chiefly look[ed] for active usefulness." Mrs. Thomson was particularly qualified for work in education, having achieved considerable success as a teacher during her previous stay at Batavia. Persistence and patience finally received their rewards at Karangan too, when, primarily through the efforts of Mrs. Thomson, a school was started there in early 1844.

The effect that Mrs. Thomson's death had on the mission is explained in the following communication from Thomson and Steele:

> Sickness and death have again visited our contracted circle. One, whom we were disposed to regard as all-important to our comfort and efficiency, has been taken from the midst of us…Since her decease, every feasible attempt has been made to attain the same end, but all has proved unavailing. Appearances have, indeed, often been promising, and occasionally we have supposed ourselves even on the point of victory, when suddenly our fond hopes have been at once blasted by an enemy wholly invisible and altogether too subtle for us to grapple with. As to measures, we have tried everything that we could think of which approved itself to our judgments and seemed to promise success. We have endeavored to win the children by the most conciliatory manner, while urging the importance of the kindness of our designs by such little presents, judiciously given, as we supposed would be likely to awaken feelings of attachment, without developing the principle of avarice.

With the death of Mrs. Thomson and the frequent absence of the Youngbloods for reasons of health, the lack of a woman missionary at Karangan presented a special problem for Thomson and Steele. According to the missionaries, chastity was not one of the virtues of the Dyak women and this could lead to embarrassing situations, as is explained in the following letter of July 15, 1845:

> Another circumstance which presses upon us with peculiar weight just now, as both of us are without a family, is the extreme impurity of the thought and feelings of these people. They themselves are so full of uncleanliness, that we can scarcely go out among them without subjecting ourselves to the imputation of a corresponding motive; or if we brave this, as our necessity of the case requires, the painful conviction is forced upon us that all spiritual profit is, in a great measure, prevented by the fact that their minds are filled with the most vile and debasing imaginations and surmises concerning us. A family circle is a sanctuary which a missionary to such a people needs above every other external comfort.

As explained by the missionaries, a "family circle" provided not only a "refining and elevating influence," making their tasks more endurable, but it also helped place them above suspicion in their dealings with native women.

The death of members of the missionary families and the poor health of others naturally reinforced the arguments of the critics in America who questioned the choice of Borneo as a mission field. Already at the annual meeting of General Synod in June 1843, the question was raised: "Is there not a more promising field over the vast dominions of paganism, where some of these devoted men might spend their strength to better purpose; where a ready access could be obtained, and greater results accomplished?" Thus it happened that whereas the missionaries were claim-

ing it was Divine Providence that had directed them to Borneo, critics soon began pointing to the mission's various difficulties as perhaps being Providence's way of informing the Church that the Borneo mission should be abandoned and its laborers sent to more promising fields.

In 1846, the Prudential Committee of the American Board informed the Board of Foreign Missions that it was prepared to start a mission among the Tamil people of southern India, to be under the auspices of the Reformed Church if the requisite number of missionaries could be found. The American Board intimated that perhaps the Borneo missionaries could be transferred to India if it were considered wise and proper to relinquish the Borneo field. The denominational board, however, was not yet prepared to take such a step, declaring in its report to General Synod in June 1846 that "the relinquishment of our enterprise in the vast and dark Island of Borneo, to which our brethren were led by a marked interposition of divine providence, is a measure greatly to be deprecated, and in no wise to be adopted, except for the most weighty reasons." It was agreed, however, that the final decision on the matter should be left to the missionaries in the field, just as it was left to them a few years earlier to decide the China question.

How did the missionaries feel about the suggestions made by the American Board? In a joint letter of August 31, 1846, addressed to it and to the denominational Board of Foreign Missions, Thomson, Youngblood, and Steele confirmed the views they had made earlier to General Synod.

> That Southern India…is an interesting field, and inviting to missionary effort—far more so, perhaps, than this which we at present occupy—is a fact that we feel no disposition to controvert; and it would rejoice our hearts to learn that our Church had resolved to establish a mission in that field, apparently so white to the harvest. But after endeavoring to take a full and impartial view of the subject in all its bearings, we are unanimously of the opinion that the transfer of the Borneo Mission is not advisable while our prospects here in the prosecution of our work, and of eventual success, are no more dark and discouraging than at present.

The missionaries then proceeded to list the various reasons against relinquishing the Borneo field—reasons that were substantially the same as those that had been given before, particularly in the "Appeal" of early 1844. A mission once started, they declared, ought not be given up except for the most compelling reasons. Moreover, before a mission is abandoned, consideration must be given to the time and funds that had gone into it and to the probable effect the closing might have on the people it had been serving. Finally, consideration must be given to whether the field to be abandoned was one of man's choosing or God's.

The Borneo missionaries also advised their overseers in America to keep in mind the problems that had once faced other missionaries in regions elsewhere and how long it took them to achieve success.

> Will any say that the Dyaks are more hopeless subjects than the Indians in America, the Greenlanders, the Tartars, or the degraded inhabitants of the South Seas? We think not. But let it be admitted that they are more ignorant, superstitious, debased, and surrounded by a worse influence, than the people just named, should that justify the Church in abandoning them, and permitting the present and future generations, as well as the past, to go down to everlasting death without any further efforts to rescue them? Or shall we wait for a more favorable period, when the hearts of the people shall be more inclined to the reception of the truth? But who can tell when this more favorable period will arrive? Will it be ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred years hence? Let us remember that the command of the Lord is, "Preach the gospel to every creature." Let it be remembered, too, that they are our brethren, descended from the same common parents with ourselves, and are therefore as much entitled to our immediate sympathies and efforts as others; and, degraded, superstitious, and fast bound in Satan's chains though they be, that the Spirit's influence can with infinite ease deliver them from their dread superstitions and the vassalage in which they have been held for ages.

Despite their determination and dedication, circumstances beyond the control of the missionaries eventually caused them, one by one, to leave their beloved Karangan. The first to depart was Thomson. The death of his second wife in December 1844, was only one of several personal tragedies that this saintly man had to bear since coming to the East Indies in late 1838. His first wife had died at Batavia in November 1839. Later, at Karangan, he also had to bury two small daughters, one in September 1843, the other in March 1844. A short time after the death of his second wife, he suffered further grief when his son of about six months of age died. Despite these sad experiences, Thomson never once lost his faith. In the midst of all this adversity, he could still write:

> The Lord be praised for all his goodness. Hope I have and a heart to devote myself anew to his service, and to walk before him with all humility of mind and meekness of disposition. May he give me grace henceforth to bury self and exalt the Saviour alone.

Devoting himself "anew to his service" is precisely what the Reverend Thomson did. Indeed, these sorrowful events seemed to spur him on to work harder than before, not only as an itinerant missionary visiting and preaching among the Dyak villages but also as a translator. On March 25, 1845, he wrote: "Had the high satisfaction this P. M. of finishing my translation of the Gospel according to Matthew. It was a touching moment, and what could I do but commend the work to the approbation

and blessing of God." About six months later, he reported having finished translating the first twenty chapters of Genesis. As a means of improving his own knowledge of the Dyak language and as a help to others wishing to learn it, he began compiling a dictionary. On April 4, 1846, he wrote: "Today I have set about an arduous task, viz., the preparation of a Dyak-English Dictionary. The materials for this I have, of course, been long collecting, and it struck me that the time had come for a vigorous effort to get the arrangement and translation of the words fairly under way." He also started translating into Dyak "A Harmony of the Gospels" and revising several small religious treatises published by the American Tract Society.

Although Thomson's faith never wavered in the midst of his grief, he did show concern about the future of his two remaining motherless children, both girls—one by his first wife and the other by his second. It was primarily for this reason that he requested permission to take a furlough from Karangan. He was also prompted in making this request because of his own failing health, which in the spring of 1846 began showing symptoms, including hemorrhaging of the lungs, that were soon to bring him to the grave. His plans called for a visit first to Berne, Switzerland to call upon his second wife's parents and to leave his younger daughter in their care. Following this, Thomson planned to journey to the United States, where he would leave his older daughter with his first wife's parents, who resided in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After a brief sojourn in the United States, he intended to return to Borneo.

Thomson left Karangan in September 1846 but he had to wait two months at Pontianak before he was able to obtain passage for Singapore, from which he planned to board another ship for a European port. At Singapore, a serious illness forced another long delay. As always, though, Thomson kept himself occupied: while recuperating, he worked on a small elementary book on the Dyak language which he planned to have printed before continuing his journey.

Not until March 12, 1847, was Thomson finally able to depart from Singapore. At St. Helena, his older daughter, Helen Maria, was transferred to a ship bound for the United States, while he accompanied his younger daughter to Marseilles, France and from there, overland to Berne, Switzerland. Thomson planned to spend only about a month in Switzerland before proceeding to the United States and then ultimately back to Borneo. With reference to his return, Thomson was very determined, declaring that "where so much toil has been devoted and prayer offered, there remains a work to be done and a harvest [to be] reaped." It soon became obvious, however, that he would never again return to Borneo—and, indeed, that he would never again set foot on American soil His health, which had remained very delicate during the entire voyage from Singapore, steadily worsened after his arrival in Switzerland. He died there on March 3, 1848.

The Youngbloods were the next to leave Borneo. As was noted, they had left Karangan in the early spring of 1844 because of Mrs. Youngblood's health and because it was thought necessary to maintain a resident at Pontianak to look after the secular needs of the inland mission. While at Pontianak, Youngblood was expected

to work among any Dyaks residing in the vicinity. Because they were few in number and not easily accessible (the nearest Dyaks were two days journey from Pontianak), it is not surprising that Youngblood asked to return to Karangan as soon as his wife's health permitted. This was agreed to by Thomson and Steele with the understanding that henceforth the secular affairs of the mission would be taken care of by having one of the missionaries make a quarterly journey to Pontianak. The Youngbloods thereupon returned to Karangan sometime in 1845.

In the summer of 1846, Youngblood's own health, which had never been strong, steadily deteriorated so that he was confined to his house and could preach only with difficulty. He was soon obliged to spend about another three months at Pontianak to obtain medical attention. Unfortunately, he had hardly returned to Karangan again when his entire family became seriously ill. It was thereupon decided that this time the Youngbloods should go to Singapore in the hope that a change of climate would prove beneficial. The family arrived at Singapore on April 29, 1847, but the change was of little help. A young son of the Youngbloods died soon after their arrival, and the health of the parents improved minimally.

The question then arose, What should be done next? Youngblood's attitude at this time was typical of that which all the missionaries had shown since their first arrival in the East Indies a decade earlier: complete trust in God and a conviction that whatever happened would be in accordance with His will. Thus, on May 31, 1847, a short time after his son's death, Youngblood wrote the secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions:

> But we would not be over concerned and anxious with regard to the future, knowing not what a day may bring forth, as we have been strikingly taught in the late afflictive dispensation of Providence. To God we would commit our way, trusting that He, in His own good time, will make the path of duty plain before us, if He is pleased to spare our lives.

Friends at Singapore suggested that the Youngbloods return to America, but the missionary strongly opposed this. He was afraid that to do so would mean an end of the Borneo mission because Steele, whose health was also failing, would be left alone and there was little immediate prospect of reinforcements. Youngblood was of a mind to return at once to Borneo, but he was told that this would be suicidal because of the current state of his health. For a time, he considered going to Shanghai where the climate would be cooler, but he finally left for a brief sojourn to India.

With the death of Mrs. Thomson and the departure of her husband, together with the frequent incapacity of the Youngbloods for reasons of health, the situation in Borneo reached a crisis stage. It became obvious that something had to be done quickly or the mission would probably perish for lack of an adequate staff. On November 19, 1847, the Reverend Rufus Anderson, secretary of the American Board, wrote a lengthy letter to the Reverend Thomas De Witt, secretary of the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions, describing the critical situation of the Borneo mission and

urging that immediate measures be taken to rescue it from extinction. De Witt was told to use the letter in whatever way he saw fit. It was therefore published in the December 9, 1847 issue of the *Christian Intelligencer.*

In his letter, Anderson strongly urged the students at New Brunswick Seminary and young Reformed pastors, as well as church members as a whole, to awaken "to a consciousness of a divine call in their hearts" and to take note of the "indications of Providence" telling them what must be done to prevent the Borneo mission from being abandoned. "Let a few men and women," he wrote, "nobly resolve to prosecute this mission. I verily believe they will every one do their beloved Church more good by going to Borneo than they can by staying home." Anderson also reminded his readers that the Borneo field too

> is a part of the Redeemer's purchased possession. He died for the Dyaks, as really as for any other people. His command is that the gospel be preached to *them* , and his providence sent our brethren of your Church thither to preach it. Who can tell but *this* is the set time to give them the gospel, and that the *Reformed Dutch Church* is the very body of Christians which the Lord Jesus would have to perform the labor for gathering his chosen people among the Dyaks into his fold? What if the Dyaks be a scattered, degraded people, and difficult of access? The work must be done at some time, and by somebody. If we refuse to do it, because there are more eligible fields, do we not risk the favor and blessing of our divine Lord, and in respect to all our enterprises?

In January 1848, Anderson made a special visit to New York to confer with the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions on the subject of reinforcements for the Borneo mission. His remarks before the Board were virtually the same as those he had stated in his letter of the previous November.

Meanwhile, the Reverend De Witt and the denominational Board were also diligently trying to find a solution during this critical period. In a letter published in the April 13, 1848 issue of the *Christian Intelligencer* , De Witt wrote: "There is no room for delay; the exigency is pressing. Without help furnished at once, there is danger of extinction to the mission." A similar communication from De Witt had appeared in the Reformed Church paper on September 2 of the previous year.

Because no response was forthcoming to any of these appeals, the Board of Foreign Missions together with the Prudential Committee of the American Board sent a joint letter in late February 1848 to Thomson at Berne, Switzerland. The letter asked him to confer with the professors at the well-known Missionary Seminary at Basel, Switzerland to see if two or three young men from that institution could be recruited for the Borneo mission. Nothing came from this approach, however, because Thomson had died before the communication reached him.

When the end of the Borneo mission came, it came very quickly. About the time that Anderson made his special visit to New York to confer with the denominational

Board in January 1848, Youngblood had once again returned to Karangan to resume his labors among the Dyaks. Unfortunately, his health was still very feeble and he had to return almost immediately to Singapore. Convinced now that only a long rest in a favorable climate would cure him, he finally left with his family for America in January 1849.

When the Youngbloods left Borneo for the last time, they reported that Steele's health was definitely failing too and that he could remain there only at the risk of his life. Steele himself eventually had to admit this, and in early 1848, he requested permission to return to America for a time to regain his health. When he received permission to leave, he still hesitated for almost a year. Finally, on April 28, 1849 he departed for Singapore from where he took ship for Boston on June 7. Because of various delays enroute, he did not reach his destination until late November. The following comment in the *Christian Intelligencer* for July 6, 1848 concerning the withdrawal of Youngblood and the impending departure of Steele describes, in an almost foreboding manner, the impact of these recent developments: "The mission is at present broken up, and whether for a time, or permanently remains to be seen. This was *the mission* specially selected by ourselves as a Church, and where beloved brethren have faithfully labored."

Youngblood and Steele fully expected to return to Borneo to resume their labors after regaining their health. In fact, a communication of September 6, 1849, states that Steele was "on his way to this country [from Borneo] mainly for the purpose of procuring the necessary apparatus for publishing the Scriptures there." No mention was made about his health. Soon after his arrival, both he and Youngblood were asked to visit various Reformed churches as well as New Brunswick Seminary in an effort to recruit new missionaries who would accompany them on their return to Borneo.

In the fall of 1849, at the request of General Synod's Committee on Missions, special missionary meetings were held at a number of Reformed churches, including those at Albany, Poughkeepsie, Kingston, Coxsackie, and elsewhere. The dates of the meetings were staggered so that interested parties could, if they wished, attend all of them. Special speakers were brought in to discuss the different aspects of missions and to describe the various foreign fields, including that at Borneo. Steele had not yet returned to America and thus was unable to attend, while Youngblood's health was such that he was prevented from participating, although he did put in an appearance at some of the meetings. The Reverend Elbert Nevius, however, who, it will be recalled, had spent some time in Borneo during the early period, was present at nearly every session and strongly urged his audiences to renew their support for the mission there.

In due time, Steele too, following a long rest to regain his health, delivered numerous addresses in behalf of the Borneo mission. His first discourse was given in the Third Reformed Church of Albany, his native city, in late September 1850. Thereafter, he spoke to congregations in several other Reformed churches during the next few months. Being an accomplished speaker and an eyewitness to events in Borneo,

his audiences sat with rapt attention as he described conditions on the island and the history of the mission. No one among his listeners could fail to note the fond hopes he cherished for returning to Borneo someday. Unfortunately, his appeals, like those of Nevius earlier, failed to solicit any volunteers. As Youngblood never fully recovered his health and it would have been foolhardy for Steele to return alone, the Borneo mission was abandoned.

What finally happened to the mission property in Borneo? Because Steele had expected to return there, he took steps at the time of his departure to secure the safety of the buildings and movable goods so that the work could be easily resumed whenever the favorable moment occurred. To that end, he rented the mission houses at Pontianak to Dutch military officers and directed that the income derived therefrom be used to pay the expenses for having someone look after the other property, including that at Karangan. Once it was certain the mission was going to be abandoned, however, the houses at Pontianak were sold for a small sum of money—small because they had deteriorated and because the mission had never owned the land on which the houses stood. (The Dutch colonial government, whose own administrative and residential buildings adjoined those of the missionaries, had merely allowed the mission the free use of the land.) The buildings at Karangan brought an even less amount because of lack of demand. They finally had to be disposed of for whatever was considered the salvage value of the plank floors.

Most of the mission's movable property was sold at an auction held at Pontianak on June 4, 1853. At this time, such items as furniture, bedding, clothing, dinnerware, cooking utensils, and so forth were sold for whatever price they could bring. The carrying out of these transactions, as well as the sale of the houses, was placed in the hands of the Dutch officials at Pontianak and a Chinaman who had been a close friend of the missionaries. On the recommendation of Steele, instructions were sent to these men asking that the books belonging to the mission be sent to the Reformed missionaries at Amoy, China. Even this disposal of the last material vestiges of the Borneo mission had a sad ending. A letter from the United States consulate at Singapore, dated November 7, 1853, states that three boxes which had been received at his office from Pontianak to be forwarded to the Reverend Elihu Doty at Amoy had arrived in such a broken condition that most of their contents of books and pamphlets were ruined.

11
Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the closing of the Borneo mission was due primarily to its being chronically shorthanded. Although a total of seventeen Reformed missionaries, nine men and eight women, had been sent to the East Indies, the number actually in the field at any one time was always considerably smaller. Several missionaries had to return home soon after arrival, including the Ennis, Nevius, and Van Doren families. Similarly, in the spring of 1844, the Dotys and Pohlmans left for Amoy, China. Death also took its toll. On November 16, 1839, the first Mrs. Thomson died at Batavia. The Reverend Isaac Stryker passed away unexpectedly on March 27, 1842 shortly before he was to begin his work at Borneo, and on December 5, 1844, the Reverend Thomson's second wife died. Several children of the missionaries also died.

A discussion of the shortage of missionaries cannot overlook the effect that the absence of a medical doctor had on the situation at Karangan. A physician would not only have been an additional means for winning the confidence and support of the natives, but would have been a comfort for the missionary families during their frequent illnesses. Perhaps Mrs. Thomson's life and that of the missionary children would have been spared, and maybe the Reverend Thomson himself would not have considered it necessary to take his two remaining children out of Borneo. Probably, too, the Youngbloods and later also Steele would have been able to remain at their posts.

Appeals for reinforcements eventually became a regular feature of the communications reaching America from Borneo. The requests were always duly taken note of by religious leaders and organizations in America and attempts were made to fulfill them. These efforts took various forms, including notices and letters in the *Christian Intelligencer*, addresses before General Synod, and speeches to the student body at New Brunswick Seminary. When the Reverend Nevius returned to the United States from Borneo in 1841, the Board of Foreign Missions commissioned him to visit Reformed congregations in order to "enlist them more effectually in the cause of foreign missions." In the following year, General Synod was informed that Nevius

had discharged his duties in this regard "to the highest satisfaction of the Board." Unfortunately though, his efforts, like others later, failed to recruit any new staff members for the Borneo mission.

It is significant to note that the Reverend William Steele was the last missionary to appear before the Board of Foreign Missions to receive an appointment to Borneo. This occurred in February 1841—all the others having been appointed before that date. It must therefore be asked, Why, despite numerous appeals, no other candidates presented themselves for the Borneo mission after Steele? The question is particularly interesting because there was during this time a surplus of ministers in the Reformed Church. For example, the Committee on the State of Religion reported to General Synod in 1848 that out of three hundred ordained ministers in the Church, sixty were without charge. A similar report had been made about a decade earlier.

In explaining why it was so difficult to obtain reinforcements for the Borneo mission, the historian can only conjecture. Perhaps news about the death of members of the missionary families, together with the health problems of others and the absence of a competent physician, dampened some of the early interest that had been shown. It is possible, too, that the optimistic reports during the early period misled readers, causing them to expect too much at first and thus adding to their disillusionment later. For example, in 1839, the *Christian Intelligencer* published a letter from the Reverend Ennis describing the possibility that missionaries might have "ready access…to all the independent islands still farther to the East [of Java], as far as New Guinea, and even to the islands beyond." When, a short time later, the missionaries had to report that their activities would be restricted to only part of Borneo, some persons who were once enthusiastic about missions in that part of the world perhaps had a change of mind as the scope of operations was narrowed. Similarly, the reports during the early period about the enthusiastic receptions being accorded the missionaries by the Chinese and Dyaks could not help convey the impression among some readers that success was near at hand. However, although later reports continued to exude optimism about the future, some readers could hardly fail to have their enthusiasm dampened as they continued to read about the same old obstacles facing the missionaries and the continued inability to report any converts.

Although the shortage of staff members looms high as an explanation for the failure of the Borneo mission, other factors must also be noted. The language problem was a serious handicap, and especially so because of the numerous dialects. As Thomson once expressed it, "The curse of Babel has fallen with peculiar weight upon these benighted regions." Communications between Borneo and the United States also constituted a problem, as the interval between the time the missionaries wrote home for instructions and when they received a reply could be a year or longer. As an illustration of delays, there is the Reverend Pohlman's not learning about his father's death until ten months after the funeral—when he read about it in a recently arrived *Christian Intelligencer*!

The restrictions placed on the missionaries by the Dutch colonial government also constituted a handicap at first. Fortunately, this problem eventually became less

acute as restraints were relaxed. Thus, in July 1845, Thomson and Steele could write: "Thus far we have no reason to complain either of unkind treatment or of officious interference with our work. Indeed, our relations with all those in the employment of the government have been of the most satisfactory character."

With specific reference to the Dyaks, several unique problems were present. One of the most serious at times was the attitude of the Malays, who were fearful they might lose control over the Dyaks if they showed too great an interest in the Christian message. But the Dyaks themselves occasionally showed a distrust of the intentions of the missionaries. Although relations between the two groups were generally very cordial, the Dyaks tended to look upon all white people in a similar light. As a consequence, rumors about Dutch imperialism elsewhere in the East Indies, along with the British defeat of China in 1842 and the British intrusions then going on in northern Borneo, made the Dyaks suspicious that the missionaries, although Americans, were really there to spy out the land. Such a view was enhanced by the inquiries they often made of the natives, and the careful notes they took regarding the names of villages and how far it was from one place to another. At times, too, the Dyaks wondered if perhaps the real purpose of the missionaries was to secure the gold and diamonds found on the island. Further aggravating the problems among the Dyaks was the clanship that existed among them at the village level. Generally, the group as a whole had to approve a change, thereby enabling one man, especially if he were a person of prominence, to frustrate attempts to introduce the gospel into a particular community.

The Dyaks also doubted whether the missionaries ever really intended to stay permanently in Borneo, and this too, according to Steele, made it very difficult to win converts. Try as they might, the missionaries could never fully convince the Dyaks of their intentions to remain. Steele, in keeping Thomson informed of the latest developments at Karangan after his departure, wrote him in August 1847:

> Na Nyumpeka asked me, a few days since, if we were intending to occupy this place until the coconuts should appear on our trees, &, knowing how prevalent is the thought that we never purposed [a long] stay, I told him, I trust with conscientious earnestness, that I hoped to live & die here, if such were the will of God. And yet, though they hold our character for veracity perfect [and] though they see arrangements & improvements of a permanent character from time to time effected—they unquestionably doubt…Perhaps in any case it would have been difficult for them to expect a long tarry in a land like this by white men, *men of wealth*, but the progressive decrease of our number has [also] set its stamp to their apprehensions.

It appears that finances were not a major stumbling block to the success of the mission. Although the amount of financial support received for the Borneo mission was small, it must be borne in mind that expenses were also relatively low. This is

clearly seen in the following communication of September 13, 1843 from Youngblood to the Reverend Thomas Vermilye, president of the Foreign Missionary Association of the Collegiate Reformed Church of New York City:

> Perhaps you wish to know something respecting our pecuniary matters? I will give you a few items. Our family expenses since we have been on this island have amounted to about $400 yearly, exclusive of house-rent, freight, postage, and physicians' bills, which perhaps have amounted to $100 more, cash. The expense of the boarding schools, containing 19 scholars, amounts [annually] to between $300 and $350.

Expenses were kept low by the fact that native labor was cheap and the missionaries grew their own fruit and vegetables and kept several chickens for eggs as well as a few goats for milk.

Funds came from several sources, including the American Board and various Reformed classes and churches. Assistance also came occasionally from special groups. For example, before Youngblood left the United States in 1836, the children of the Sunday school class of the Collegiate Church of New York City presented him with a number of Bibles and hymn books as well as a sum of money to be distributed as he saw fit among the children of the East Indies. On one occasion, the crew of an American warship in Singapore donated a sum of money to one of the missionaries who happened to be in that port at the time.

Although the Panic of 1837 temporarily delayed the departure of missionaries during the early period because of lack of funds, money was available during the later critical period when the overwhelming problem was one of obtaining recruits. Thus, as early as the summer of 1843, the Prudential Committee of the American Board declared itself ready to help finance two missionaries and even a physician if any were willing to go there. Similarly, in an urgent letter of November 19, 1847, Secretary Anderson, speaking on behalf of the American Board, informed the Board of Foreign Missions: "We have never for a moment doubted, if suitable missionaries could be obtained, that there would be funds for their support."

Despite its problems and its eventual abandonment, the Reformed mission in Borneo was not without significant results. The training that Pohlman and Doty received in the Chinese language helped tremendously in preparing them for their later work at Amoy on the Chinese mainland, where Pohlman served for five years and Doty for twenty. Similarly, missionaries from other denominations could gain from the progress made by Thomson, Youngblood, and Steele in reducing many Dyak words to writing and in translating a significant amount of devotional literature. As explained by Thomson shortly before he left Borneo: "By the acquisitions now made…all future laborers will stand on a vantage-ground, which will contribute not a little to facilitate their progress in subduing to the obedience of the faith these dark domains of the adversary."

One of the most interesting results of the Borneo mission was its demonstrating that women, too, could play an important role in missions. The Reformed women

went to the East Indies with determination to assist in furthering the Kingdom causes. Miss Condict declared she never regretted going there, and Mrs. Ennis wrote a few months after her arrival at Batavia that of "female usefulness there cannot be the slightest doubt," and added, "If my life is spared, with the aid of our Heavenly Father, I hope to do something…in His blessed cause."

The role played by missionary wives demonstrated clearly the error in the thinking among some leaders of the American Board that married women should not serve in the foreign field. At Borneo, missionary wives shared equally with their husbands the privations and lack of comforts that went with living in thatched huts in the sweltering tropical heat. The women, too, studied the native languages in order to advance the work of the mission in whatever way they could, particularly in the field of education. Mrs. Pohlman, for example, became proficient enough in Chinese to conduct a school for Chinese children, as did Mrs. Youngblood for the Malays and Mrs. Thomson for the Dyaks. The women sometimes took native children into their homes as boarders to facilitate their education. That the married women were as dedicated as their husbands and could play a significant role is demonstrated in a communication from the Reverend Thomson written a short time after he had established himself at Karangan:

> I am happy…to say [that] the companion whom the Lord has given me glories in the work to which we are mutually devoted, and esteems it an honor, not only to labor but to suffer for His sake. She fears no dangers and shrinks from no difficulties or privations which may lie in the path of duty. Her only watchword is Onward, and her heart beats devotion at every step.

One of the most striking impressions that the historian receives from examining the Borneo correspondence is the deep religious faith and trust of the missionaries. Never once, despite innumerable physical and other problems, did they waver in their belief in God and in His divine plan. The following quotation, taken from the "Appeal", was typical of their way of explaining how God in His inscrutable wisdom oftentimes used trouble and sorrow to test man's faith as well as to advance His Kingdom causes:

> In coming hither we have had to pass through a burning fiery furnace, not so much of the flesh but of the spirit. The discipline has been awfully severe, to the Church as well as to ourselves. He may—nay, he unquestionably must—have had our mutual probation and purification in view, in this trying process. Happy we, if it has effectually fitted us for our work and prepared us henceforward to prosecute it in simplicity and godly sincerity. But we trust, yea, we have a sweet and sustaining confidence, he has had a further and yet more glorious object to observe. We cannot but hope that the salvation of multitudes of these

> miserable and degraded Dyaks is the great final cause of these mysterious movements.

In the same way that the missionaries took a providential view of their own personal difficulties, they also acknowledged their complete dependence on the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of the heathen to the gospel message. As Youngblood expressed it, "Continually we are impressed with the truth that nothing less than the Spirit's influence can quicken their dull perceptions and renew their hard hearts; and for this influence we would constantly and fervently pray." Similarly, in another communication, he wrote that without divine aid, the missionaries could just as well, "like the prophet of old, prophesy to the dry bones, but they will not live, except the breath of the Lord breathe upon them." And Thomson declared in one of his writings: "My readers…must not forget that the Spirit with a breath can render every…Dyak village an interesting assembly, and every such house a church of the living God."

In its annual report to General Synod in June 1849, the Committee on Missions reported, "It is indeed painful to reflect upon the trials and sorrows experienced in respect to the Borneo Mission." Today, one hundred and forty years later, it is still painful to reflect on the events that occurred in Borneo during the decade between the arrival of the first Reformed missionaries there and the departure of the Reverend Steele. But such a reflection can also be an inspiring experience. One can only use adjectives like "steadfast," "saintly," "devoted," and "self-denying" to describe the lives of the missionaries who, though faced with almost insurmountable problems and many personal misfortunes, remained firm and undaunted in their work.

What the missionaries could not achieve in their own lifetimes, they believed others would accomplish after them. The Reverend Pohlman stated it well when he wrote: "It is yet a day of small things with us. We are only pioneers…preparing the way for others to gather in the harvest. And herein is that saying true—'One soweth and another reapeth.'" Unfortunately, when the little phalanx of original laborers finally had to give up and retire from the field, no new Reformed missionaries came to replace them. In the final analysis, it must be said that the failure of the Borneo Mission rested not with the missionaries, but with the Church as a whole. To paraphrase slightly a report of July 6, 1848 in the *Christian Intelligencer*, "The faith of the Church was not commensurate with the faith of the Borneo missionaries."

Bibliographical Note

Most of the information in this study came from letters written by the missionaries to relatives and friends in the United States as well as to official agencies of the Reformed Church and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Many of these letters are found in the *Christian Intelligencer*, a religious journal issued weekly by the Reformed Church, and the *Missionary Herald*, a monthly publication of the American Board. There are also a number of such letters in manuscript form in the Reformed Church Archives, with its office at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Another important source of information has been the journals kept by some of the missionaries, lengthy excerpts of which were published in the *Christian Intelligencer*. The annual reports on foreign missions that appeared in the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod* of the Reformed Church were also helpful. A brief survey of the Borneo Mission is found in *A Manual of the Missions of the Reformed Church* edited by Margaret E. Sangster (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church, 1877). The author is grateful for the help he received from Russell Gasero, the Reformed Church archivist, in locating manuscript materials.